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Biography.

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LIVES
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VOL. I.

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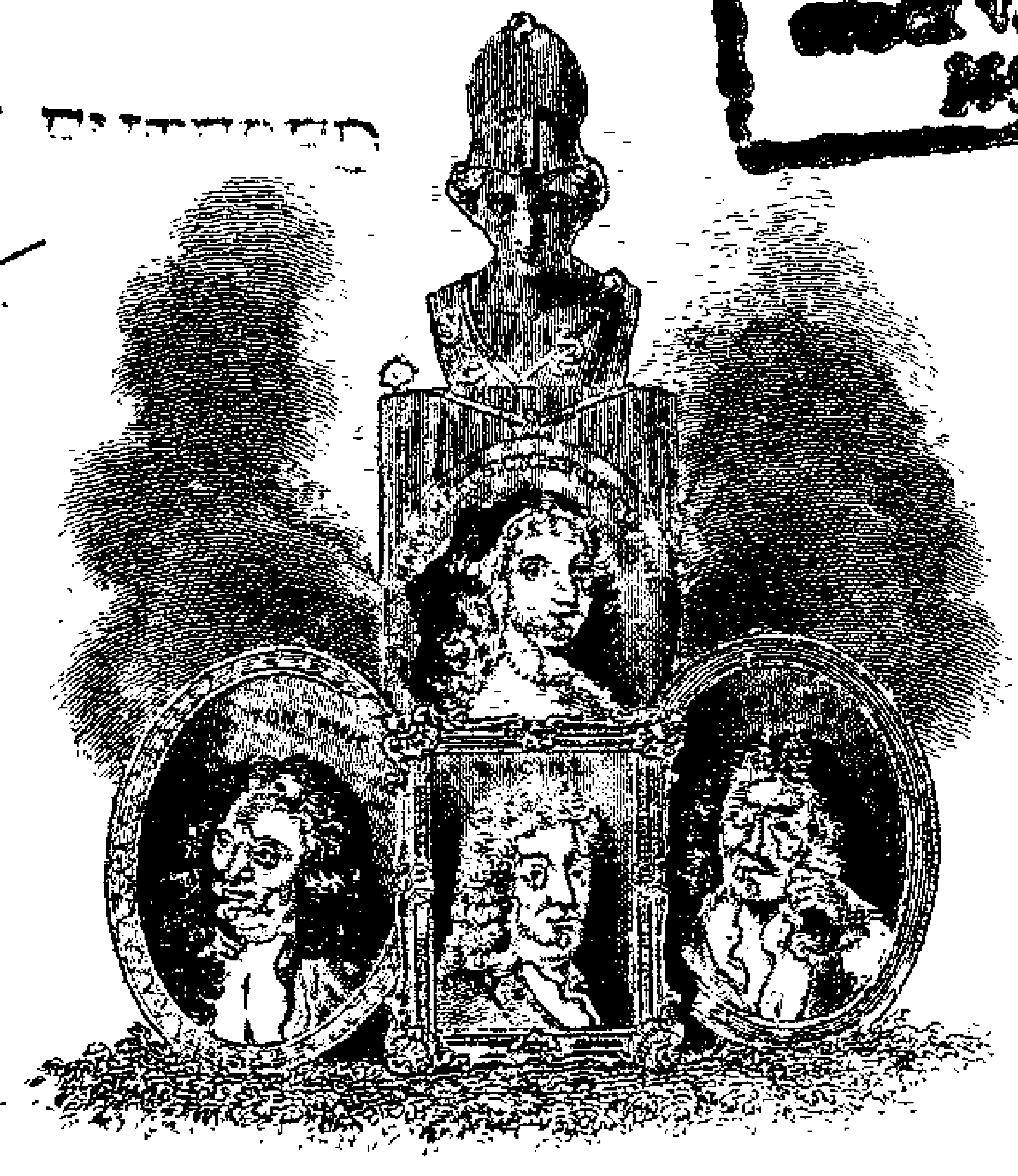

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LIVES

OF

EMINENT

LITERARY AND SCIENTIFIC MEN.

MONTAIGNE.

1533—1592.

There is scarcely any man into whose character we have more insight than that of Montaigne. He has written four volumes of "Essays," which are principally taken up by narrations of what happened to himself, or dissertations on his own nature, and this in an enlightened and philosophical, though quaint and *naïve* style, which renders him one of the most delightful authors in the world. It were easy to fabricate a long biography, by drawing from this source, and placing in a consecutive view, the various information he affords. We must abridge, however, into a few pages several volumes; while, by seizing on the main topics, a faithful and interesting picture will be presented.

Michel de Montaigne was born at his paternal castle of that name*, in Perigord, on the 8th of February, 1533. He was the son of Pierre Eyquem, esquire—seigneur of Montaigne, and at one time elected mayor of Bordeaux. This portion of France, Gascony and Guienne, gives birth to a race peculiar to itself; vivacious, warm-hearted, and

* This château was situate in the parish of Saint Michael de Montaigne, not far from the town of Saint Foi, in the diocese of Perigueux, at the distance of about ten leagues from the episcopal city. It was solidly and well built, on high ground, and enjoyed a good air.

vain — they are sometimes boastful, but never false; often rash, but never disloyal; and Montaigne evidently inherited much of the disposition peculiar to his province. He speaks of his family as honourable and virtuous:— "We are a race noted as good parents, good brothers, good relations," he says,—and his father himself seems eminently to deserve the gratitude and praise which his son bestows. His description of him is an interesting specimen of a French noble of those days: —"He spoke little and well, and mixed his discourse with allusions to modern books, mostly Spanish; his demeanour was grave, tempered by gentleness, modesty, and humility; he took peculiar care of the neatness and cleanliness of his dress, whether on horseback or on foot; singularly true in his conversation, and conscientious and pious, almost even to superstition. For a short slight man he was very strong; his figure was upright and well proportioned; he was dexterous and graceful in all noble exercises; his agility was almost miraculous; and I have seen him, at more than sixty years of age, throw himself on a horse, leap over the table, with only his thumb on it, and never going to his room without springing up three or four stairs at a time." Michel was the eldest of five sons. His father was eager to give him a good education, and even before his birth consulted learned and clever men on the subject. On these consultations and on his own admirable judgment he formed a system, such as may in some sort be considered the basis of Rousseau's; and which shows that, however we may consider one age more enlightened than another, the natural reason of men of talent leads them to the same conclusions, whether living in an age when warfare, struggle, and the concomitant ignorance were rife, or when philosophers set the fashion of the day. "The good father whom God gave me," says Montaigne, "sent me, while in my cradle, to one of his poor villages, and kept me there while I was at nurse and longer, bringing me up to the hardest and commonest habits of life. He had another notion, also, which was to ally me with the

people, and that class of men who need our assistance; desiring that I should rather give my attention to those who should stretch out their arms to me, than those who would turn their backs; and for this reason he selected people of the lowest condition for my baptismal sponsors, that I might attach myself to them." He was taught, also, in his infancy directness of conduct, and never to mingle any artifice or trickery with his games. With regard to learning, his good father meditated long on the received modes of initiating his son in the rudiments of knowledge. He was struck by the time given to, and the annoyance a child suffers in, the acquirement of the dead languages; this was exaggerated to him as a cause why the moderns were so inferior to the ancients in greatness of soul and wisdom. He hit, therefore, on the expedient of causing Latin to be the first language that his son should hear and speak. He engaged the services of a German, well versed in Latin, and wholly ignorant of French. "This man," continues Montaigne, "whom he sent for expressly, and who was liberally paid, had me perpetually in his arms. Two others of less learning, accompanied to relieve him; they never spoke to me except in Latin; and it was the invariable rule of the house, that neither my father nor my mother, nor domestic, nor maid, should utter in my presence any thing except the few Latin phrases they had learnt for the purpose of talking with me. It is strange the progress that every one made. My father and mother learnt enough Latin to understand it, and to speak it on occasions, as did also the other servants attached to me;—in short, we talked so much Latin, that it overflowed even into our neighbouring villages, where there still remain, and have taken root, several Latin names for workmen and their tools. As for me, at the age of six, I knew no more French than Arabic; and, without study, book, grammar, or instruction, — without rod and tears — I learnt as pure a Latin as my schoolmaster could teach, for I could not mix it with any other language. If, after the manner of colleges, I had a theme set me,

it was given, not in French, but in bad Latin, to be turned into good; and my early master, George Buchanan and others, have often told me that I was so ready with my Latin in my infancy, that they feared to address me. Buchanan, whom I afterwards saw in the suite of the marshal de Brissac, told me that he was about to write on education, and should give mine as an example. As to Greek, of which I scarcely know any thing, my father intended that I should not learn it as a study, but as a game—for he had been told to cause me to acquire knowledge of my own accord and will, and not by force, and to nourish my soul in all gentleness and liberty, without severity or restraint, and this to almost a superstitious degree; for having heard that it hurts a child's brain to be awoke suddenly, and torn from sleep with violence, he caused me to be roused in the morning by the sound of music, and there was always a man in my service for that purpose.

"The rest may be judged of by this specimen, which proves the prudence and affection of my excellent father, who must not be blamed if he gathered no fruits worthy of such exquisite culture. This is to be attributed to two causes: the first is the sterile and troublesome soil; for although my health was good, and my disposition was docile and gentle, I was, notwithstanding, so heavy, dull, and sleepy, that I could not be roused from my indolence even to play. I saw well what I saw; and beneath this dull outside I nourished a bold imagination, and opinions beyond my age. My mind was slow, and it never moved unless it was led—my understanding tardy—my invention idle—and, amidst all, an incredible want of memory. With all this it is not strange that he succeeded so ill. Secondly, as all those who are furiously eager for a cure are swayed by all manner of advice, so the good man, fearing to fail in a thing he had so much at heart, allowed himself at last to be carried away by the common opinion; and, not having those around him who gave him the ideas of education which he brought from Italy, sent me, at

six years of age, to the public school of Guienne, which was then very flourishing, and the best in France. It was impossible to exceed the care he then took to choose accomplished private tutors; but still it was a school: my Latin deteriorated, and I have since lost all habit of speaking it; and my singular initiation only served to place me at once in the first classes; for when I left college, at the age of thirteen, I had finished my course, but, truly, without any fruit at present useful to me.

"The first love I had for books came to me through the pleasure afforded by the fables in Ovid's Metamorphoses. For, at the age of seven or eight, I quitted every other pleasure to read them; the more that its language was my maternal one, and that it was the easiest book I knew, and, considering the matter, the best adapted to my age. I was more careless of my other studies, and in this was lucky in having a clever man for my preceptor, who connived at this and similar irregularities of mine; for I thus read through the Æneid, and then Terence and Plautus, led on by delight in the subject. If he had been so foolish as to prevent me, I believe I should have brought from college a hatred of all books, as most of our young nobles do. He managed cleverly, pretending not to see; and sharpened my appetite by only allowing me to devour these volumes by stealth, and being easy with me with regard to my other lessons; for the principal qualities which my father sought in those who had charge of me were kindness and good humour; consequently idleness and laziness were my only vices. There was no fear that I should do harm, but that I should do nothing—no one expected that I should become wicked, but only useless. It has continued the same: the complaints I hear are of this sort: that I am indolent, slow to perform acts of friendship, too scrupulous, and disdainful of public employments. Meanwhile my soul had its private operations, and formed sure and independent opinions concerning the subjects it understood, digesting them alone, without communication; and among

other things, I believe it had been incapable of submitting to force or violence."

It would require a volume almost to examine the effect that this singular education had on Montaigne's character. If absence of constraint strengthened the defects of his character, at least it implanted no extraneous ones. His defective memory was not cultivated, and therefore remained defective to the end. His indolence continued through life: he became somewhat of a humourist; but his faculties were not deadened, nor his heart hardened, by opposition and severity.

Montaigne's heart was warm; his temper cheerful*, though unequal; his imagination lively†; his affections exalted to enthusiasm; and this ardour of disposition, joined to the sort of personal indolence which he describes, renders him a singular character. On leaving college he studied law, being destined for that profession; but he disliked it; and, though he was made counsellor to the parliament of Bordeaux, he, in the sequel, gave up the employment as by no means suited to him. He lived in troubled times. Religious parties ran high, and were so well balanced, the kingly power being diminished through the minority of Charles IX., and that of the nobles increasing in consequence, that the struggle between the two was violent and deadly. Montaigne was a catholic and a lover of peace. He did not mingle with the dissensions of the times, avoided all public employments, and it is not in the history of his times that we must seek for the events of his life.

The chief event, so to call it, that he himself records

* "Je suis des plus exempt de la passion de tristesse, et ne l'aime ni l'estime; quoique le monde a entreprins, comme à prix faist de l'honnorer de faveur particulière: ils en habillent la sagesse, la vertu, la conscience; sot et monstreux ornement!"

† "Je suis de ceulx qui sentent tres grand effort de l'imagination; chascun en est heurte mais aulcuns en sont renversez. Son impression me perce; et mon art est de lui eschapper par faulte de force à luy resister. Je vivroys de la seule assistance de personnes saines et gayes; la veue des angoisses d'autruy m'àngoisses materiellement, et a mon sentiment souvent usurpé le sentiment d'un tiers. Je visite plus mal voluntiers les malades auxquels, le devoir m'interesse que ceux auxquels je m'attends moins et que je considere moins, je saisis le mal que j'estudie et le couche en moi."

with fondness and care, is his friendship for Etienne de 1559.
la Boëtie. To judge by the only writing we possess of Ætat.
this friend, composed when he was scarcely more than 26.
seventeen, his Essay on "Voluntary Servitude," he evidently deserved the high esteem in which Montaigne held him, though apparently very dissimilar from him in character. Boldness and vigour mark the thoughts and style; love of freedom, founded on a generous independence of soul, breathes in every line; the bond between him and Montaigne rested on the integrity and lofty nature of their dispositions—on their talents—on the warmth of heart that distinguished both—and a fervid imagination, without which the affections seldom rise into enthusiasm. Montaigne often refers to this beloved friend in his essays. "The greatest man I ever knew," he writes, "was Etienne de la Boëtie. His was indeed a soul full of perfections, a soul of the old stamp, and which would have produced great effects had fate permitted, having by learning and study added greatly to his rich natural gifts."* In another essay, which is entitled "Friendship," he recounts the history of their intimacy. "We sought each other," he writes, "before we met, on account of what we heard of each other, which influenced our inclinations more than there seems to have been reason for, I think through a command of Heaven. We, as it were, embraced each other's names; and at our first meeting, which was by chance, and at a large assembly, we found ourselves so drawn together, so known to each other, that nothing hereafter was nearer than we were one to the other. He wrote a beautiful Latin poem to excuse the precipitation of our intimacy, which so promptly arrived at its perfection. As it was destined to last so short a time, and began so late, for we were both arrived at manhood, and he was several years the elder, it had no time to lose; it could not regulate itself by slow and regular friendships, which require the precaution of a

* Tom iii. liv. ii. chap. 17.

long preluding acquaintance. Ours had no idea foreign to itself, and could refer to itself alone; it did not depend on one special cause, nor on two, nor three, nor four, nor a thousand, but was the quintessence of all which seized on *my* will, and forced it to merge and lose itself in his, and which, having seized *his* will, led him to merge and lose his in mine, with equal desire and eagerness. I use the word *lose* as the proper one, for we neither reserved any thing that was not common to both. Our souls mingled so entirely, and penetrated with such ardent affection into the very essence of each other, that not only was I as well acquainted with his as with my own, but certainly I should have more readily trusted him than myself. This attachment must not be put in the same rank with common friendships. I have known the most perfect of a slighter kind; and, if the rules are confounded, people will deceive themselves. In other friendships you must proceed bridle in hand; in the more exalted one, the offices and benefits which support other intimacies do not deserve even to be named. The perfect union of the friends causes them to hate and banish all those words that imply division and difference, such as benefit, obligation, gratitude, entreaty, thanks, and the like. All is in common with them; and, if in such a friendship one could give to the other, it would be him who received that would benefit his companion. Menander pronounced him happy who should meet only with the shadow of such a friend: he was right; for if I compare the rest of my life, though, with the blessing of God, I have passed it agreeably and peacefully, and, save from the loss of such a friend, exempt from any poignant affliction, with a tranquil mind, having taken the good that came to me originally and naturally, without seeking others; yet, if I compare the whole of it, I say, with the four years during which it was given me to enjoy the dear society of this person, it is mere smoke,—it is a dark and wearisome night. I have dragged it out painfully since I lost him; and the very

pleasures that have offered themselves to me, instead of consoling, doubled the sense of my loss. We used to share every thing, and methinks I rob him of his portion. I was so accustomed to be two in every thing that I seem now but half of myself. There is no action nor idea that does not present the thought of the good he would have done me, for as he surpassed me infinitely in every talent and virtue, so did he in the duties of friendship."

A severe illness of a few days carried off this admirable friend. Montaigne recounts, in a letter to his father, the progress of the malady, and his death bed; and nothing can be more affecting, nor better prove the noble and virtuous qualities of both, than these sad hours when the one prepared to die, and the other ministered to the dying. This loss was never forgotten; and we find, in the journal of his travels in Italy, written eighteen years after, an observation, that he fell one morning into so painful a reverie concerning M. de la Boëtie that his health was affected by it. 1563. Ætat. 30.

Montaigne married at the age of thirty-three: he married neither from wish nor choice. "Of my own will," he says, "I would have shunned marrying Wisdom herself, had she asked me. But we strive in vain; custom, and the uses of common life, carry us away: example, not choice, leads me in almost all my actions. In this, truly, I did not go of my own accord, but was led, or carried, by extraneous circumstances; and certainly I was then less prepared, and more averse than now that I have tried it. But I have conducted myself better than I expected. One may keep one's liberty prudently; but, when once one has entered on the obligation, one must observe the laws of a common duty." Montaigne made, therefore, a good husband, though not enthusiastically attached, and a good father — indeed, in all the duties of life, he acted better than was expected of him. At his death, his father * left him his estate, fancying that it

* He displayed his affectionate gratitude towards his excellent father by a tender veneration for his memory. He preserved with care the furni-

would be wasted through his indolence and carelessness; but Montaigne's faults were negative; and he easily brought himself to regard his income as the limit of his expenses, and even kept within it. His hatred of business and trouble, joined to sound common sense, led him to understand that ease could be best attained by limiting his desires to his means, and by the degree of order nesary to know what these means were; and his practice accorded with this conclusion.

Montaigne's father lived to old age. He married late in life, and we are ignorant of the date of his death; from that period Montaigne himself seems to have lived chiefly at his paternal castle. It would appear that he was at that time under forty *; and henceforth his time was, to a great degree, spent in domestic society, among the few books he loved, writing his essays, and attending to the cares that wait upon property. It is not to be supposed, however, that he lived a wholly sedentary and inactive life. Though he adhered to no party, and showed no enthusiasm in the maintenance of his opinions, his disposition was inquisitive to eagerness, ardent and fiery. The troubles that desolated his country throughout his life fostered the activity of mind of which his writings are so full. He often travelled about France, and, above all, was well acquainted with Paris and the court. He loved the capital, and calls himself a Frenchman only through his love of Paris, which he names the glory of

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ture of which he made personal use; and wore, when on horseback, the cloak his father wore,—"Not for comfort," he says, "but pleasure—methinks I wrap myself in him."

* In one of his early essays, he says, "Exactly fifteen days ago I completed my thirty-ninth year" (liv. i. chap. 19.); and in a former one he says, "Having lately retired to my own residence, resolved, as well as I can, to trouble myself with nothing but how to pass in repose what of life is left to me, it appeared to me that I could not do better than to allow my mind, in full idleness, to discourse with itself, and repose in itself, which I hoped it would easily do, having become slower and riper with time; but I find, on the contrary, that, like a runaway horse, it takes a far swifter course for itself than it would for another, and brings forth so many fantastic and chimerical ideas, one after the other, without order or end, that, for the sake of contemplating their folly and strangeness at my ease, I have resolved to put them down, hoping in time to make it ashamed of itself."

France, and one of the noblest ornaments of the world. He attended the courts at the same time of the famous duke de Guise and the king of Navarre, afterwards Henry IV. He had predicted that the death of one or the other of these princes could alone put an end to the civil war, and even foresaw the likelihood there was that Henry of Navarre should change his religion. He was at Blois when the duke de Guise was assassinated; but that event took place long subsequent to the period of which we at present write.

During his whole life civil war raged between catholic and huguenot. Montaigne, attached to the kingly and catholic party, abstained, however, from mingling in the mortal struggles going on.* Yet sometimes they intruded on his quiet, and he was made to feel the disturbances that desolated his country. It is a strange thing to picture France divided into two parties, belonging to which were men who risked all for the dearest privilege of life, freedom of thought and faith; and were either forced, or fancied that they were forced, to expose life and property to attain it; and to compare these religionists in arms with the tranquil philosopher, who dissected human nature in his study, and sounded the very depths of all our knowledge in freedom and ease, because he abstained from certain watchwords, and had no desire for proselytes or popular favour. "I regard our king," he says, "with a mere legitimate and political affection, neither attracted nor repelled by private interest; and in this I am satisfied with myself. In the same way I am but moderately and tranquilly attached to the general cause, and am not subject to entertain opinions in a deep-felt and enthusiastic manner. Let Montaigne, if it must, be swallowed up in the public ruin; but, if there is no necessity, I shall be thankful to fortune to save it. I treat both parties equally, and say nothing to one that I could not say to the other, with the accent only a little changed; and there is no motive of utility that could induce me to lie."

* One of his reasons for abstaining from attacking the huguenots, may be found in the circumstance that one of his brothers, M. de Beauregard, had been converted to the reformed religion.

This moderation, on system, of course led him, in his heart, to be inimical to the reformers. "They seek reformation," he says, in the worst of destructions, and aim at salvation by the exact modes in which we are sure to reap damnation; and think to aid divine justice and humanity by overturning law and the rulers, under whose care God has placed them, tearing their mother (*the church*) to pieces, to give portions to be gnawed by her ancient enemies, filling their country with paricidal hatreds." This is no lofty view of the great and holy work of reformation, the greatest and (however stained by crime, the effect of the most cruel persecutions) the most beneficent change operated in modern times in human institutions. Montaigne goes on: — "The people suffered greatly then, both for the present and the future, from the devastation of the country. I suffered worse, for I encountered all those injuries which moderation brings during such troubles—I was pillaged by all parties. The situation of my house, and my alliance with my neighbours, gave me one appearance, my life and actions another; no formal accusations were made, for they could get no hold against me; but mute suspicion was secretly spread. A thousand injuries were done me one after another, which I could have borne better had they come altogether."

His mode of preserving his castle from pillage was very characteristic. "Defence," he says, "attracts enterprise, and fear instigates injury. I weakened the ardour of the soldiery by taking from their exploit all risk or matter for military glory, which usually served them as an excuse: what is done with danger is always honourable at those periods when the course of justice is suspended. I rendered the conquest of my house cowardly and treacherous; it was shut against no one who knocked; a porter was its only guard, an ancient usage and ceremony, and which did not serve so much to defend my abode as to offer an easier and more gracious entrance. I had no centinel but that which the stars kept for me. A gentleman does wrong to appear in a state of

defence who is not perfectly so. My house was well fortified when built, but I have added nothing, fearing that such might be turned against myself. So many garrisoned houses being taken made me suspect that they were lost through that very reason. It gave cause and desire for assault. Every guarded door looks like war. If God pleased I might be attacked, but I would not call on the assailant. It is my retreat wherein to repose myself from war. I endeavour to shelter this corner from the public storm, as also another corner in my soul. Our contest vainly changes its forms, and multiplies and diversifies itself in various parties—I never stir. Among so many armed houses, I alone, in France, I believe, confided mine to the protection of Heaven only, and have never removed either money, or plate, or title-deed, or tapestry. I was resolved neither to fear nor to save myself by halves. If an entire gratitude can acquire divine favour, I shall enjoy it to the end; if not, I have gone on long enough to render my escape remarkable; it has lasted now thirty years." And he preserved his philosophy through all. "I write this," he says, in one of his essays, "at a moment when the worst of our troubles are gathering about me; the enemy is at my gates, and I endure all sorts of military outrage at once." He gives an interesting account of how, on one occasion, by presence of mind and self-possession, he saved his castle. A certain leader, bent on taking it and him, resolved to surprise him. He came alone to the gate and begged to be let in. Montaigne knew him, and thought he could rely on him as his neighbour, though not as his friend: he caused his door to be opened to him as to every one. The visitant came in a hurried manner, his horse panting, and said that he had encountered the enemy, who pursued him, and he being unarmed, and with fewer men about him, he had taken shelter at Montaigne's, and was in great trouble about his people, whom he feared were either taken or killed. Montaigne believed the tale and tried to reassure and comfort him. Presently five or six of his followers, with the same appearance of terror, pre-

sented themselves; and then more and more, to as many as thirty, well equipped and armed, pretending that they were pursued by the enemy. Montaigne's suspicions were at last awakened; but finding that he must go on as he had begun, or break out altogether, he betook himself to what seemed to him the easiest and most natural course, and ordered all to be admitted; "being," he says, "a man who gladly commits himself to fortune, and believing that we fail in not confiding sufficiently in Heaven." The soldiers having entered remained in the court yard—their chief, with his host, being in the hall, he not having permitted his horse to be put up, saying he should go the moment his people arrived. He now saw himself master of his enterprise,—the execution alone remained. He often said afterwards—for he did not fear to tell the tale—that Montaigne's frankness and composure had disarmed his treachery. He remounted his horse and departed, while his people, who kept their eyes continually upon him to see if he gave the signal, were astonished to behold him ride off and abandon his advantage.

On another occasion, confiding in some truce, he undertook a journey, and was seized by about thirty gentlemen, masked, as was the custom then, followed by a little army of arquebussiers. Being taken, he was led into the forest and despoiled of his effects, which were valuable, and high ransom demanded. He refused any, contending for the maintenance of the truce; but this plea was rejected, and they were ordered to be marched away. He did not know his enemies, nor, apparently, did they know him; and he and his people were being led off as prisoners, when suddenly a change took place: the chief addressed him in mild terms, caused all his effects to be collected and restored, and the whole party set at liberty. "The true cause of so sudden a change," says Montaigne, "operated without any apparent cause, and of repentance in a purpose then through use held just, I do not even now know. The chief among them unmasked, and told his name, and several times afterwards said that I owed my deliverance to my composure, to the courage and firm-

ness of my words, which made me seem worthy of better treatment."

As Montaigne advanced in life he lost his health. The stone, which he believed he inherited from his father, and painful nephritic colics that seized him at intervals, put his philosophy to the test. He would not allow his illnesses to disturb the usual tenor of his life, and, above all, refused medical aid, having also inherited, he says, from his father a contempt for physicians. There was a natural remedy, however, by which he laid store, one much in favour at all times on the continent — mineral and thermal springs. The desire to try these, as well as a wish to quit for a time his troubled country, and the sight of all the misery multiplying around him, caused him to make a journey to Italy. His love of novelty and of seeing strange things sharpened his taste for travelling; and, as a slighter motive, he was glad to throw household cares aside; for, though the pleasures of command were something, he received perpetual annoyances from the indigence and sufferings of his tenants, or the quarrels of his neighbours: to travel was to get rid of all this at once.

Of course, his mode of proceeding was peculiar: he had a particular dislike to coaches or litters, — even a boat was not quite to his mind; and he only really liked travelling on horseback. Then he let every whim sway him as to the route: it gave him no annoyance to go out of his way: if the road was bad to the right, he took to the left: if he felt too unwell to mount his horse, he remained where he was till he got better: if he found he had passed by any thing that he wished to see, he turned back. On the present occasion his mode of travelling was, as usual, regulated by convenience: hired vehicles carried the luggage while he proceeded on horseback. He was accompanied by several friends, and, among others, by his brother, M. de Mattecoulon. Montaigne had the direction of the journey. We have a journal of it, partly written in his own hand, partly

dictated to his valet, who, though he speaks of his master in the third person, evidently wrote only the words dictated. This work, discovered many years after Montaigne's death, never copied nor corrected, is singularly interesting. It seems to tell us more of Montaigne than the Essays themselves; or, rather, it confirms much said in those, by relating many things omitted, and throws a new light on various portions of his character. For instance, we find that the eager curiosity of his mind led him to inquire into the tenets of the protestants; and that, at the Swiss towns, he was accustomed, on arriving, to seek out with all speed some theologian, whom he invited to dinner, and from whom he inquired the peculiar tenets of the various sects. There creeps out, also, an almost unphilosophical dislike of his own country, springing from the miserable state into which civil war had brought it.*

1580. Ætat. 47. The party set off from the castle of Montaigne on the 22d of June, 1580: they proceeded through the north-east of France to Plombieres, where Montaigne took the waters, and then went on by Basle, Baden, in the canton of Zurich, to Constance, Augsburgh, Munich, and Trent. It is not to be supposed that he went to these places in a right line: he often changed his mind when half way to a town, and came back; so that at last his zigzag mode of proceeding rendered several of his party restive. They remonstrated; but he replied, that, for his own part, he was bound to no place but that in which he was; and that he could not go out of his way, since his only object was to wander in unknown places; and so that he never followed the same road twice, nor visited the same place twice, his scheme was accomplished. If, indeed, he had been alone,

* "M. de Montaigne trouvoit à dire trois choses en son voïage: l'un qu'il n'eut mené un cuisinier pour l'instruire de leurs façons, et en pouvoir un jour faire la preuve chez lui; l'autre qu'il n'avait mené un valet Allemand, on n'avait cherché la compagnie de quelque gentilhomme du païs, car de vivre à la merci d'un belitre de guide il y sentoit une grande incommodité; la tierce qu' avant faire le voyage il n'avait veu les livres qui le pouvoint avertir, des choses rares et remarquables de chaque lieu. Il meloli à la vérité à son jugement un peu de passion de mepris de son pais, qu'il avait à haine et à contre-cœur pour autres considerations."

he had probably gone towards Cracovia, or overland to Greece. instead of to Italy; but he could not impart the pleasure he took in seeing strange places, which was such as to cause him to forget ill health and suffering, to any other of his party: they only sought to arrive where they could repose; he, when he rose after a painful uneasy night, felt gay and eager when he remembered that he was in a strange town and country; and was never so little weary, nor complained so little of his sufferings, having his mind always on the stretch to find novelties and to converse with strangers; for nothing, he says, hurt his health so much as indolence and *ennui*.

With all his windings, after he had visited Venice, which "he had a hunger to see," he found himself in Rome on the last day of November, having the previous morning risen at three hours before daylight in his haste to behold the eternal city. Here he had food in plenty for his inquiring mind; and, getting tired of his guide, rambled about, finding out remarkable objects alone; making his shrewd remarks, and trying to discover those ancient spots with which his mind was familiar. For Latin being his mother-tongue, and Latin books his primers, he was more familiar with Roman history than with that of France, and the names of the Scipios and Metelli were less of strangers to his ear than those of many Frenchmen of his own day. He was well received by the pope, who was eager to be courteous to any man of talent and rank who would still abide by the old religion. Montaigne, before he set out, had printed two books of his "Essays:" these were taken at the custom-house and underwent a censorship: several faults were found — that he had used the word fortune improperly; that he cited heretical poets; that he found excuses for the emperor Julian; that he had said that a man must of necessity be exempt from vicious inclinations while in the act of prayer; that he regarded all tortuous modes of capital punishment as cruel; that he said that a child ought to be brought up

to do every thing. Montaigne took this fault-finding very quietly, saying that he had put these things down as being his opinions, and without supposing that they were errors; and that sometimes the censor had mistaken his meaning. Accordingly, these censures were not insisted upon; and when he left Rome, and took leave of the prelate, who had discoursed with him on the subject, he begged him not to pay any regard to the censure, which was a mistaken one, since they honoured his intentions, his affection for the church, and his talents; and so esteemed his frankness and conscientiousness, that they left it to him to make any needful alterations in another edition: and they ended by begging him to assist the church with his eloquence, and to remain at Rome, away from the troubles of his native
1581. country. Montaigne was much flattered by this cour-
Ætat. tesy, and much more so by a bull being issued which
48. conferred on him the citizenship of Rome, pompous in seals and golden letters, and gracious in its expressions. Nothing, he tells us, ever pleased him more than this honour, empty as it might seem, and had employed to obtain it, he says, all his five senses, for the sake of the ancient glory and present holiness of the city.

The descriptions which he gives of Rome, of the pope, and all he saw, are short, but drawn with a master's hand —graphic, original, and just; and such is the unaltered appearance of the eternal city, that his pages describe it as it now is, with as much fidelity as they did when he saw it in the sixteenth century. Its gardens and pleasure-grounds delighted him; the air seemed to him the most agreeable he had ever felt; and the perpetual excitement of inquiry in which he lived, his visits to antiquities, and to various beautiful and memorable spots, delighted him; and neither at home nor abroad was he once visited by gloom or melancholy, which he calls his death.

On the 19th of April he left Rome, and passing by the eastern road, and the shores of the Adriatic, he visited Loretto, where he displayed his piety by presenting a silver tablet, on which were hung four silver figures,—

that of the virgin, with those of himself, his wife, and their only child, Eleanor, on their knees before her; and performed various religious duties, which prove the sincerity of his catholic faith. In the month of May he arrived at the baths of Lucca, where he repaired for the sake of the waters. He took up his abode at the Bagni di Villa, and with the exception of a short interval, during which he visited Florence and Pisa, he remained till September, when, on the 7th of that month, he received letters to inform him that he had been elected mayor of Bordeaux,—a circumstance which forced him to hasten his return; but he did not leave Italy without again visiting Rome. His journey home during winter, although rendered painful by physical suffering, was yet tortuous and wandering among the northern Italian towns. He re-entered France by Mont Cenis, and, visiting Lyons, continued his route through Auvergne and Perigord, till he arrived at the château de Montaigne.

Montaigne, though flattered by the unsought for election of the citizens of Bordeaux, the more so that his father had formerly been elected to that office, yet, from ill health and natural dislike to public employments, would have excused himself, had not the king interposed with his commands. He represented himself to his electors such as he conceived himself to be,—without party-spirit, memory, diligence, or experience. Many, indeed, in the sequel considered him too indolent in the execution of the duties of his office, while he deemed his negative merits as deserving praise, at a period when France was distracted by the dissensions of contending factions: the citizens, probably, entertained the same opinion, since he was re-elected at the end of the two years, when his office expired, to serve two years more.

Montaigne's was a long-lived family; but he attained no great age, and his latter years were disturbed by great suffering. Living in frequent expectation of death, he was always prepared for it,—his affairs being arranged, and he ready to fulfil all the last pious catholic

duties as soon as he felt himself attacked by any of the frequent fevers to which he was subject. One of the last events of his life was his friendship with mademoiselle Marie de Gournay le Jars, a young person of great merit, and afterwards esteemed one of the most learned and excellent ladies of the day; and honoured by the abuse of pedants, who attacked her personal appearance and her age, in revenge for her transcending even their sex in accomplishments and understanding: while, on the other hand, she was regarded with respect and friendship by the first men of her time. She was very young when Montaigne first saw her, which happened during a long visit he made to Paris, after his mayorship at Bordeaux was ended. Having conceived an enthusiastic love and admiration of him from reading his essays, she called on him, and requested his acquaintance. He visited her and her mother at their château de Gournay, and allied himself to her by adopting her as his daughter, and entertaining for her a warm affection and esteem. His picture of her is not only delightful, as a testimony of the merits of this young lady*, but a proof of the unfailing enthusiasm and warmth of his own heart, which, even in suffering and decay, eagerly allied itself to kindred merit.

1585. Ætat. 52.

The illness of which he died was a quinsey, that brought on a paralysis of the tongue. His presence of mind and philosophy did not desert him at the end: he is said, as one of his last acts, to have risen from his bed, and, opening his cabinet, to have paid his servants

* "J'ai pris plaisir de publier en plusieurs lieux l'espérance que j'ai de Marie de Gournay le Jars, ma fille d'alliance, et certes aimée de moi beaucoup plus que paternellement, et envellopée en ma retraite et solitude comme l'une des meillieures parties de mon propre estre : je ne regarde plus qu'elle au monde. Si l'adolescence peut donner présage, cette alme sera quelque jour capable des plus belles choses, et entre autre de la perfection de cette tressainte amitié, ou nous ne lisons point que son sexe ayt peu monter encores : la sincérité et la solidité de ses mœurs y sont déjà bastantes ; son affection vers moi, plus què surrabondante, et telle, en somme, qu'il n'y a rien a souhaiter, sinon que l'appréhension qu'elle a de ma fin par les cinquante et cinq ans auxquels elle ma rencontré, la travaillant moins cruellement. Le jugement qu'elle fait de mes premiérs Essais, et femme, et si jeune, et seule en son quartier, et la véhémence fameuse dont elle m'aima et me desira longtemps, sur la seule estime qu'elle eu prins de moi, longtemps avant m'avoir vue, sont des accidens de très digne considération."

and other legatees the legacies he had left them by will, foreseeing that his heirs might raise difficulties on the subject. When getting worse, and unable to speak, he wrote to his wife to beg her to send for some gentlemen, his neighbours, to be with him at his last moments. When they arrived, he caused mass to be celebrated in his chamber: at the moment of the elevation he tried to rise, when he fell back fainting, and so died, on the 13th of September, 1592, in the sixtieth year of his age. He was buried at Bordeaux, in a church of the commandery of St. Anthony, and his widow raised a tomb to his memory.

Montaigne was rather short of stature, strong, and thick set: his countenance was open and pleasing. He enjoyed good health till the age of forty-six, when he became afflicted by the stone. Vivacious as a Gascon, his spirits were unequal,—but he hated the melancholy that belonged to his constitution, and his chief endeavour was to nourish pleasing sensations, and to engage his mind, when his body was unemployed, in subjects of speculation and inquiry.

Of three daughters who had been born to him, one, named Eleonora, alone survived.* But his other daughter by adoption, mademoiselle de Gournay, deserved also that name, by the honour and care she bestowed on his memory. Immediately on his decease, the widow and her daughter invited her to come and mourn their loss with them; and she crossed all France to Bordeaux in compliance with their desire. She afterwards published several editions of his "Essays," which she dedicated to the cardinal de Richelieu, and accompanied by a preface, in which she ably defended the work from the attacks made against it. This preface, though somewhat heavy, is full of sound reasoning, and displays learning and acuteness, and completely replies to all the blame ever thrown on his works.

* Eleonore de Montaigne married twice. She had no children by her first marriage. Her second husband was the viscount de Gamache. From this marriage the counts of Segur are descended in the female line.

Montaigne's "Essays" have also been attacked in modern times. It requires that the reader should possess some similarity to the author's own mind to enter fully into their merits, and relish their discursive style. The profoundest and most original thinkers have ever turned to his pages with delight. His skilful anatomy of his own mind and passions,—his enthusiasm, clothed as it is in apparent indifference, which only renders it the more striking,—his lively and happy descriptions of persons,—his amusing narratives of events,—his happy citations of ancient authors,—and the whole instinct with individuality;—perspicuity of style, and the stamp of good faith and sincerity that reigns throughout;—these are the charms and merits of his "Essays,"—a work that raises him to the rank of one of the most original and admirable writers that France has produced.

RABELAIS.

1483—1553.

Francis Rabelais, — "the great jester of France," as he is designated by Lord Bacon ; a learned scholar, physician, and philosopher, as he appears from other and eminent testimonies, — was one of the most remarkable persons who figured in the revival of letters. It is his fortune, like the ancient Hercules, to be noted with posterity for many feats to which he was a stranger, — but which are always to his disadvantage. The gross buffooneries amassed by him in his nondescript romance have made his name a common mark for any extravagance or impertinence of unknown or doubtful parentage. The purveyors of anecdotes have even fixed upon him some of the *lazzi*, as they are called, which may be found in the stage directions of old Italian farce. Those events and circumstances of his life which are really known, or deserving of belief, may be given within a narrow compass. We, of course, reject, in this notice, all that would offend the decencies of modern and better taste.

Rabelais was born at Chinon, a small town of Touraine. The date of his birth is not ascertained ; but the generally received opinion of his death, at the age of 70, in 1553, would place his birth in 1483. There is the same uncertainty respecting the condition of his father ; whether that of an innkeeper or apothecary. His predilection for the study of medicine favours the latter supposition, whilst the imputed habits of his life countenance the former. If, however, he was really abandoned to intemperance, as he is represented by his adversaries, who were many and unscrupulous, it may, with equal propriety, be charged to his monastic educa-

tion, at a time when cloisters were the chosen seats of debauchery and ignorance.

He received his first rudiments at the convent of Sevillé, near his native town, where his progress was so slow that he was removed to another in Angiers. Here also his career seemed unpromising; and the only advantage he derived was that of becoming known to the brothers Du Bellay, one of whom, afterwards bishop of Paris and cardinal, was his patron and friend through life.

From Angiers he passed to a convent of cordeliers at Fontenaye-le-Compte, in Poitou. He now applied himself, for the first time, to the cultivation of his talents, but under circumstances the most unfavourable. The cordeliers of Fontenaye-le-Compte had no library, or notion of its use. Rabelais assumed the habit of St. Francis, distinguished himself by his preaching, and employed what he received for his sermons and masses in providing himself with books. The animosity of his brother monks was excited against him: they envied and hated him, for his success as a preacher, and for his superior attainments;—but his great and crying sin in their eyes was his knowledge of Greek, the study of which they denounced as an unholy and forbidden art. This was perfectly consistent: they were content with Latin enough to give them an imposing air with the multitude; some did not know even so much, and, instead of a breviary, carried a wine flask exactly resembling it in exterior form.

His brother monks annoyed and harassed Rabelais by all the modes which malice, ignorance, and numbers can employ against an individual, and in a convent. The learned Budeus *, alluding to the persecutions which he was suffering, says, in one of his letters, "I understand that Rabelais is grievously annoyed and persecuted, by those enemies of all that is elegant and graceful, for his ardour in the study of Greek literature. Oh! evil infatuation of men whose minds are so dull and stupid!" They at last condemned him to live *in pace;* that is

* Guillaume Budé.

to linger out the remainder of his life, on bread and water, in the prison cell of the convent.

The cause, or the pretence, of Rabelais's being thus buried alive, is described as "a scandalous adventure;" but differently related. According to some the scandal consisted in his disfiguring, by way of frolic, in concert with another young cordelier, the image of their patron saint. Others state, that on the festival of St. Francis he removed the image of the saint, and took its place. Having taken precautions to bear out the imposture, he escaped detection, until the grotesque devotions of the multitude, and the rogueries of the monks, overcame his gravity, and he laughed. The simple people, seeing the image of the saint, as they supposed it, move, exclaimed, "A miracle!" but the monks, who knew better, dismissed the laity, made their false brother descend from his niche, and gave him the discipline, with their hempen cords, until his blood appeared. We will not decide which, or whether either, of these versions be true; but it is certain that he was condemned, as we have said, to solitary confinement for life in the prison cell.

Fortunately for him, his wit, gaiety, and acquirements had made him friends who were powerful enough to obtain his release. These were the Du Bellays already mentioned, and Andre Tiraqueau, chief judge of the province, to whom one of Rabelais's Latin letters is addressed;—a man of learning, it would appear, and an upright judge. The letter is addressed, "Andreo Tiraquello, equissimo judici, apud Pictones," and commences "Tiraquelle doctissime." Their influence obtained not only his liberty, but the pope's (Clement VII.) licence to pass from the cordeliers of Fontenaye-le-Compte, to a convent of Benedictines at Maillezieux in the same province. This latter order has been distinguished for learning, and deserves respectful and grateful mention for its share in the preservation of the classic remains of antiquity. It was, no doubt, more agreeable, or less disagreeable, to Rabelais than that which he had left; but

wholly disgusted with the monastic life, he soon threw off the frock and cowl, left the convent of his own will and pleasure, without licence or dispensation from his superiors, and for some time led a wandering life as a secular priest.

We next find him divested wholly of the sacerdotal character, and studying medicine at Montpelier. The date of this transition, as too frequently happens in the life of Rabelais, cannot be determined. He, however, pursued his studies, took his successive degrees of bachelor, licentiate, and doctor, and was, after some time, appointed a professor. He lectured, it appears from his letters of a subsequent date, chiefly on the works of Hippocrates and Galen. His superior knowledge of the Greek language enabled him to correct the faults of omission, falsification, and interpolation, committed by former translators of Hippocrates; and he executed this task, he says, by the most careful and minute collation of the text with the best copies of the original. "If this be a fault," says he, speaking of preceding mistranslations, "in other books, it is a crime in books of medicine; for in these the addition or omission of the least word, the misplacing even of a point, compromises the lives of thousands." Accordingly, his edition of Hippocrates, subsequently published by him at Lyons, has been highly prized by physicians and scholars.

Rabelais had less difficulty in restoring and elucidating the text, than in bringing into practice the better medical system of the father of the art. He complains, in his Latin epistle to Tiraqueau, at some length, but in substance, that though the age boasted many learned and enlightened men, yet the multitude was in worse than Cimmerian darkness—the many so besotted by the errors, however gross, which they had first imbibed, and by the books, however absurd, which they had first read, as to seem irremediably blind to reason and truth—clinging to ignorance and absurdity, like those shipwrecked persons who trust to a beam or a rag of the vessel which had split, instead of making an effort them-

selves to swim, and finding out their mistake only when they are hopelessly sinking. — Mountebanks and astrologers (he adds) were preferred to learned physicians, even by the great.

But his capacity and zeal were held in just estimation by the medical faculty of Montpelier. — The chancellor Duprat having, for some reason now unknown, deprived that body of its privileges, or, according to Niceron, one college only having suffered deprivation, Rabelais was deputed to solicit their restoration. There is a current anecdote of the strange mode which he took to introduce himself to the chancellor. — Arrived at the chancellor's door, he spoke Latin to the porter, who, it may be supposed, did not understand him; a person who understood Latin presenting himself, Rabelais spoke to him in Greek; to a person who understood Greek, he spoke Hebrew; and so on, through several other languages and interpreters, until the singularity of the circumstance reached the great man, and Rabelais was invited to his presence. This is in the last degree improbable. Cardinal du Bellay, his patron, was then bishop of Paris, in high favour at the court of Francis I., and, doubtless, ready to present him in a manner much more conducive to the success of his mission. The ridiculous invention was suggested by a passage of Rabelais, in which Panurge addresses Pantagruel, on their first meeting, in thirteen different languages, dead and living, not including French. Rabelais, however, pleaded the cause of the faculty of Montpelier so well, that its privileges were restored, and he was received by his colleagues on his return with unprecedented honours. So great was the estimation in which he was held henceforth, and the reverence for him after his departure, that every student put on Rabelais's scarlet gown when taking his degree of doctor. This curious usage continued from the time of Rabelais down to the Revolution. The gown latterly used was not the identical one of Rabelais. The young doctors, in their enthusiasm for its first wearer, carried off each a piece, by way of relic,

until, in process of time, it reached only to the hips, and a new garment was substituted.

Rabelais, having left Montpelier, appears next at Lyons, where he practised as a physician, and published his editions of Hippocrates and Galen, with some minor pieces, including almanacks, which prove him conversant with the science of astronomy. One almanack bearing his name is pronounced spurious, on the ground of his being made to describe himself as "physician and *astrologer*." He treated the pretended science of astrology with derision. This would add nothing to his reputation in a later age; but, considering the number of his cotemporaries, otherwise enlightened, who were not proof against this weakness, it proves him to have been one of those superior spirits whose views are in advance of their generation.

Cardinal du Bellay was sent ambassador by Francis I. to the court of Rome in 1534, and attached Rabelais as physician to his suite. He appears to have made two visits to Italy with the cardinal at this period, but there are no traces by which they can be distinguished, nor is it very material. It is made a question in one of the most recent sketches of the life of Rabelais, whether he attended the ambassador as physician or buffoon. His letters, addressed from Rome, to his friend the bishop of Maillezieux, furnish decisive evidence of his being a a person treated with respect and confidence, independently of the known friendship of the cardinal. They are the letters of a man of business, well informed of all that was passing, and trusted with state secrets. He alludes, in one letter, to the quarrels of Paul III. (now pope) and Henry VIII. It appears that the cardinal du Bellay and the bishop of Mâcon opposed and retarded, in the consistory, the bull of excommunication against Henry, as an invasion of the rights and interests of Francis I. Writing of the pope, and to a bishop, he treats him as a temporal prince, with the freedom of one man of sense and frankness writing to another, but without the least approach to levity.

We pass over the gross and idle buffooneries which Rabelais is said to have permitted himself at his first audience of the pope, and towards his person. They are too coarse to be mentioned, and too inconsistent with the probabilities of place and person to be believed. One anecdote only may be excepted, as not altogether incredible. The pope, it is said, expressed his willingness to grant Rabelais a favour, and he, in reply, begged his holiness to excommunicate him. Being asked why he preferred so strange a request, he accounted for it by saying, that some very honest gentlemen of his acquaintance in Touraine had been burned, and finding it a common saying in Italy, when a faggot would not take fire, that it was excommunicated by the pope's own mouth, he wished to be rendered incombustible by the same process. Rabelais appears to have indulged and recommended himself by his wit and gaiety at Rome; and it is not absolutely incredible that he may have gone this length with Paul III., who was a bad politician rather than a persecutor. But it is still unlikely, that whilst he was soliciting absolution from one excommunication, which he had already incurred by his apostacy from his monastic vows, he should request the favour of another, even in jest. It appears untrue that he gave offence by his buffooneries, and was punished or disgraced. This assertion is negatived by his letters, and, more conclusively, by the pope's granting him the bull of absolution, which he had been soliciting for some time.

Rabelais returned to Lyons after his first visit to Rome. After the second, he appears to have gone to Paris. No credit is due to the ridiculous artifice by which, it has been stated so often in print, he got over the payment of his hotel bill at Lyons, and travelled on to Paris at the public charge. He made up, it is pretended, several small packets, and employed a boy, the son of his hostess, to write on them "poison for the king," "poison for the queen," &c. through the whole royal family. His injunctions of secrecy of course en-

sured the disclosure of the secret by the young amanuensis to his mother, and Rabelais was conveyed a state prisoner to the capital. Arrived at Paris, and at court too, he proved the innocuous quality of his packets, and amused Francis I. by swallowing the contents. It has been justly remarked by Voltaire, that at a moment when the recent death of the dauphin had taken place under the suspicion of poison, this freak would have subjected Rabelais to be questioned upon the rack. Other ridiculous expedients, said to have been used by him, to extricate himself from his tavern bills, when he was without money to pay them, are undeserving of notice. There is no good evidence of his having been at any time under the necessity of resorting to them. His letters from Rome to the bishop of Maillezieux, of whom he was the pensioner, make it appear that his mode of life there was frugal and regular. But the common source of all these impertinent fictions is the mistake, as we have already said, of confounding an author with his book. Rabelais, the eulogist of debts and drunkenness, the high priest of "the oracle of the holy bottle," must of course have been reduced to such expedients! There cannot be a greater error. Doctor Arbuthnot, who approached the broad humour of Rabelais, even nearer than Swift, was remarkable for the gravity of his character and deportment.

Cardinal du Bellay, on his return from Rome to Paris, took Rabelais into his family, as his physician, his librarian, his reader, and his friend. It is stated, that he confided to him even the government of his household; which is itself a proof that Rabelais was not the reckless, dissolute buffoon he is represented. The cardinal's regard for him did not rest here. He obtained from the pope a bull, which secularized the abbey of St. Maur-des-Fosses, in his diocese of Paris, and conferred it on Rabelais. The next favour bestowed upon Rabelais by his patron was the cure or rectory of Meudon, which he held to his death, and from which he is familiarly styled "Le curé de Meudon."

It is not known at what periods or places Rabelais wrote his "Lives of the great Giant Garagantua and his Son Pantagruel;" to which he owes, if not all his reputation, certainly all his popularity; but he appears to have completed and republished it after his return from Italy. The date of the earliest existing edition of the first and second books is 1535; but there were previous editions, which have disappeared. The "Champ Fleury," of Geoffroy Tory, quoted by Lacroix du Maine, refers to them as existing before 1529. The royal privilege, dated 1545, granted by Francis I. to "our well-beloved Master Francis Rabelais," for reprinting a correct and complete edition of his work, sets forth that many spurious publications of it had been made; that "the book was useful and delectable;" and that its continuance and completion had been solicited of the author "by the learned and studious of the kingdom."

The book and the author were attacked on all sides, and from opposite quarters. The champions for and against Aristotle, who disputed with a sectarian animosity, equalling in fury the theological controversies of the time, suspended their warfare to turn their arms against Rabelais; he was assailed, as a common enemy, by the champions of the Romish and reformed doctrines; by the anti-stagyrite Peter Ramus, and his antagonist Peter Gallandus; by the monk of Fontevrault, Puits d'Herbault, and by Calvin. But the most formidable quarter of attack was the Sorbonne, and its accusations against him the most perilous to which he could be exposed—heresy and atheism. The book was condemned by the Sorbonne, and by the criminal section of the court of parliament.

When it is considered that Rabelais, in the sixteenth century, and in France, chose for the subjects of his ridicule and buffoonery the wickedness and vices of popes, the lazy luxurious lives and griping avarice of the prelates, the debauchery, libertinism, knavery, and ignorance of the monastic orders, the barbarous and absurd theology of the Sorbonne, and the no less

barbarous and absurd jurisprudence of the high tribunals of the kingdom, the wonder is not that he was persecuted, but that he escaped the stake. His usual good fortune and high protection, however, once more saved him. Francis I. called for the obnoxious and condemned book, had it read to him from the beginning to the end, pronounced it innocent and "delectable," and protected the author. The sentence of condemnation became a dead letter, the book was read with avidity, and Rabelais admired and sought as the first wit and scholar of his age.

Some expositors of Rabelais will have it, that his romance is the history of his own time burlesqued. The fictitious personages and events have even been resolved into the real. Nothing can be more uncertain, or indeed more improbable. The simple fact, that of two the most copious and diligent commentators of Rabelais,—Motteux and Duchat,—one has identified Rabelais's personages with the D'Albrets of Navarre, Montluc bishop of Valence, &c., whilst the other has discovered in Grandgousier, Garagantua, Pantagruel, Panurge, friar John, the characters of Louis XII., Francis I., Henry II., cardinal Lorraine, cardinal du Bellay. This fact alone proves the hopeless uncertainty of the question. Passing over the glaring want of congruity, which any reader of history and of Rabelais must observe between the personages here identified, how improbable the supposition that Rabelais should have held up to public ridicule the sovereign who protected him, and the friend upon whom he was mainly dependant! How absurd the supposition that neither of them should have discovered it, or been made sensible of it by others! We more particularly notice this baseless hypothesis,—for such it really is,—because it is the most confidently and frequently reproduced.

But, independently of what we have said, there is an outrageous disregard of all design and probability in the work, which defies any such verification. The most reasonable opinion, we think, is, that Rabelais attached

himself to no series of events, and to no particular persons, but burlesqued classes and conditions of society, and even arts and sciences, as they presented themselves to his wayward humour and ungoverned or ungovernable imagination. This view is borne out by what we read in the memoirs of the president De Thou, who describes the author and the book as follows:—"Rabelais had a perfect knowledge of Greek and Latin literature, and of medicine, which he professed. Discarding, latterly, all serious thoughts, he abandoned himself to a life of gaiety and sensuality, and, to use his expression, embracing as his own the art of ridiculing mankind, produced a book full of the mirth of Democritus, sometimes grossly scurrilous, yet most ingeniously written, in which he exhibited, under feigned denominations, as on a public stage, *all orders* of the community and of the state, to be laughed at by the public."

Perhaps the real secret of his enigmatical book may be found on the surface, in his own declaration,—that he wrote for the amusement of his patients, and of the sick and sad of mankind, "those jovial follies (cez folastreries joyeuses), whilst taking his bodily refreshment, that is, eating and drinking, the proper time for treating matters of such high import and profound science."

The charge of heresy, as understood by the church of Rome, could be easily proved against him; but there appears no good ground for that of atheism, or of infidelity. He applies texts of Scripture improperly and indecently, but rather from wanton levity of humour than deliberate profaneness; and he may have retained this part of his early habits as a cordelier,—for the monks were notorious for the licence with which they applied, in their orgies, the texts of Scripture in their breviaries,—probably the only portions of Scripture which they knew: allowance is also to be made for the tone of manners and language in an age when the most zealous preachers and theologians, Romish and reformed, indulged in profane applications and parodies of Scripture without reproach. Rabelais was in principle a reformer, but of a humour

too light and careless to embark seriously in the great cause.

No writer has had more contemptuous depreciators and enthusiastic admirers: his book has been called a farrago of impurity, blasphemy, and trash; a masterpiece of wit, pleasantry, erudition, and philosophy, composed in a charming style. An unqualified judgment for or against him would mislead. The most valuable opinions of him are those of his own countrymen, since the French language and literature have attained their highest cultivation. Labruyere, after discarding the idea of any historic key to Rabelais, says of him, that "where he is bad, nothing can be worse, he can please only the rabble; where good, he is exquisite and excellent, and food for the most delicate." Lafontaine, who in his letters calls him "gentil Maitre Français," has versified several of his tales, and even imitated his diction. Boileau called him "reason in masquerade" (la raison en masque). Bayle, however, made so light of him, that he has not deigned him an article in his dictionary, and only names him once or twice in passing. This was surely injustice from one who gives a separate and copious notice to the buffoon and bigot, Father Garasse. Voltaire has treated Rabelais contemptuously; called him "a physician playing the part of Punch," "a philosopher writing in his cups," "a mere buffoon." But these opinions, expressed in his philosophical letters, were recanted by him, after some years, in a private letter to Madame du Deffand; and he avows in it that he knew "Maitre Français" by heart. Voltaire appropriated both the matter and manner of Rabelais in some of his tales and "*faceties*," and he has been accused of this petty motive for decrying him. It was discovered, at the French revolution, that Rabelais was another Brutus, counterfeiting folly to escape the despotism of which he meditated the overthrow; and the late M. Ginguené proved, in a pamphlet of two hundred pages, that Rabelais anticipated all the reforms of that period in the church and state.

The detractors of Rabelais's book may be more easily

justified than his admirers. The favour which it obtained in his lifetime, and the popularity which it has maintained through three centuries, may be ascribed to other causes besides its merits. It had the attraction of satire, malice, and mystery, which all were at liberty to expound at their pleasure; and many, doubtless, read it for its ribald buffooneries. There is in it, at the same time, a fund of wit, humour, and invention—a rampant, resistless gaiety, which gives an amusing and humorous turn to the most outrageous nonsense. There are touches of keen and witty satire, which bear out the most favourable part of the judgment of Labruyere. The condemnation of Panurge, who is left to guess his crime, is most happily humorous and satirical, whether applied to the Inquisition or to the barbarous jurisprudence of the age. Panurge protests his innocence of all crime: "Ha! there!" exclaims Grippe-Menaud; "I'll now show you that you had better have fallen into the claws of the devil than into ours. You are innocent, are you? Ha! there! as if that was a reason why we should not put you through our tortures. Ha! there! our laws are spiders' webs; the simple little flies are caught, but the large and mischievous break through them." There is in Rabelais a variety of erudition, less curious than Butler's, but more elegant. His stock of learning, it has been said, would be indigence in later times: but it should be remembered at how little cost a great parade of erudition may now be made out of indexes and encyclopedias, whilst Rabelais, Erasmus, and the other scholars of their time, had to purvey for themselves.

Rabelais most frequently quotes; but he also appropriates sometimes, without acknowledgment, what he had read. Some of his tales are to be found in the "Facetiæ" of Poggius;—that, for instance, which has been versified by Lafontaine and Dryden: and he applied to himself, after Lucian (in his treatise of the manner of writing history), the story of Diogenes rolling his tub during the siege of Corinth. Lucian has been called his prototype. Their essentially distinctive traits may be seen at

a glance in their respective uses of this anecdote of the cynic philosopher: in the redundant picturesque buffoonery of dialogue and description of the one; the felicity, humour, severer judgment, and chaster style of the other.

It is impossible to characterise the fantastic cloud of words, so far beyond any thing understood by copiousness or diffuseness, conjured up sometimes by Rabelais; his vagrant digressions, astounding improbabilities, and monstrous exaggerations: but he has that rare endowment which all but redeems these faults, and charms the reader,—the talent of narrating. His great and fatal blemish is his grossness, his disregard of all decency, his sympathy with nastiness, his invasion of all that is weak and vile in the recesses of nature and the imagination. But it should be said for him, at the same time, that his is the coarseness which revolts, rather than the depravity which contaminates; and not only his affectation of a diction more antique than even his own age, but his use of the vulgar provincialisms called in France *Patois*, limit his popularity in the original to readers of his own country, and the better informed of other countries.

Rabelais had a host of imitators in his own age, and that which immediately succeeded: they have all sunk into utter and just oblivion, with the exception, perhaps, of Beroalde de Verville, author of the "Moyen de Parvenir." Scarron more recently made Rabelais his model, with a congenial taste for buffoonery and burlesque. Moliere has not disdained to borrow from him in his comedies. Lafontaine has versified several of the tales introduced in his romance, and has even inclined to his diction. Swift has condescended to be indebted to him. "Gulliver's Travels" and the "Tale of a Tub" both bear decisive evidence, not only in particular passages, but in their respective designs, of the author's being well acquainted with the romance of "Garagantua and Pantagruel." But the imitations only prove Swift's incomparable superiority of judgment and genius. No two things can be more different, than the grave and governed humour of Swift,

and the laughing mask of everlasting buffoonery worn by Rabelais: both employ in their fictions the mock-marvellous and gigantic; but Swift observes, throughout, a proportioned scale in his creations, whilst Rabelais outrages all proportion and probability: for instance, in his absurd yet laughable fiction of Panurge's six months' travels, and his discovery of mountains, valleys, rocks, cities, in the mouth of the great giant Pantagruel. Sterne's "Tristram Shandy" is more closely modelled upon the romance of Rabelais. There is the same love of farce, whim, and burlesque, even to the theology of the schoolmen; the same love of digression and wandering: but in Sterne, a superior finesse of perception and expression, the relief of mirth and pathos intermingled, and, above all, a tone of finer humanity.

Rabelais left, besides his romance, "Certain Books of Hippocrates;" and "The Ars Medicinalis of Galen," revised, edited, and commented by him; "The Second Part of the Medical Epistles of Manardi, a physician of Ferrara," edited and commented; "The Will of Lucius Cuspidius;" and "A Roman Agreement of Sale—venerable Remains of Antiquity:" (Rabelais was deceived—they were forgeries: the one by Pomponius Lætus; the other by Pontanus, whom Rabelais, on discovering his mistake, gibbeted in his romance). "Marliani's Topography of Ancient Rome," merely republished by him; "Several Almanacks, calculated under the Meridian of the noble City of Lyons;" "Military Stratagems and Prowess of the renowned Chevalier de Langey," a relative of his patron cardinal du Bellay (doubtful whether his); "Letters from Italy, addressed to the Bishop of Maillezieux," with a historical commentary, far exceeding the bulk of the text, by the brothers St. Marthe; "La Sciomachie" (sham battle)—a description of the fête given at Rome by cardinal du Bellay, in honour of the birth of the duke of Orleans, son of Francis I.; "Epistles," in Latin prose and French verse; "Smaller Pieces" of French poetry; "The Pantagrueline Prognostication," connected with the romance; and "The Philosophical

Cream," a burlesque on the disputations of the schoolmen and the Sorbonne.

"The heroic Lives of the great Giants Garagantua and Pantagruel" have gone through countless editions, various expurgations, and endless commentaries; but the most valuable or curious are Duchat's, with a historical and critical commentary, in French; Motteux's, with similar commentaries, in English; an edition by the bookseller Bernard, of Amsterdam, in 1741, with the annotations of the two former, revised and criticised, and illustrations of the text engraved from drawings by Picart; an edition, in three volumes, Paris, 1823, with a copious glossary, a curious and highly illustrative table of contents, and "Rabelæsiana," collected from the author's book, not from his life; another Paris edition, of the same date, in nine volumes, with a "variorum" commentary, from the earliest annotators down to Ginguené, valuable from its copiousness rather than discernment. This last edition gives the 120 wood-cut Pantagruelian caricatures, first published in 1655, under the title of "Songes drolatiques," and ascribed, upon questionable grounds, to Rabelais.

It has been said, with every appearance of truth, that the conversation and character of Rabelais were greatly superior to his book. He knew fourteen languages, dead and living, including Hebrew and Arabic, and wrote Greek, Latin, and Italian. The Greek which he puts into the mouth of Panurge, though not the purest, even for a modern, is fluent and correct. We may remark, in passing, that the Greek word "αὐτὸ," given as part of the text in the common character, is written "afto." He was conversant with all the sciences and most of the arts of his time: a physician, a naturalist, a mathematician, an astronomer, a theologian, a jurist, an antiquary, an architect, a grammarian, a poet, a musician, a painter. His person and deportment are described as noble and graceful, his countenance engaging and expressive, his society agreeable, his disposition generous and kind. He was the physician as well as pastor of

his parishioners at Meudon, where he passed his time between the society of men of letters and his friends, his clerical and medical duties, and teaching the children who chanted in the choir the elements of music. He died, it is supposed, in 1553, at the age of seventy, in Paris, and was buried in the churchyard of St. Paul, Rue des Jardins, at the foot of a tree, which, out of respect to his memory, was religiously spared, until it disappeared by natural decay.

It is untrue that he sent to cardinal du Bellay, from his deathbed, this idle message, by a page whom the cardinal had sent to know his state — "Tell the cardinal I am going to try the great 'perhaps'—you are a fool—draw the curtain — the farce is done;" or that he made this burlesque will, — "I have nothing — I owe much — I leave the rest to the poor;" or that he put on a domino when he felt his death approaching, because it is written, "beati qui moriuntur in Domino." They are impertinent fictions. Duverdier (quoted by Niceron in his Literary Memoirs, vol. xxxii.) had spoken ill of Rabelais in his "Bibliothéque Française," but retracted in his "Prosographie," and bore testimony to the Christian sentiments in which he died.

No monument has been placed over the grave of Rabelais, but he has been the subject of many epitaphs. We select two of them; one in Latin, the other in French: —

Ille ego Gallorum gallus Democritus, ill.
Gratius aut siquid gallia progenuit.
Sic homines, sic et cœlestia numina lusi,
Vix homines, vix ut numina læsa putes.

Pluton, prince du sombre empire,
Ou les tiens ne rient jamais,
Reçois aujourdhui Rabelais,
Et vous aurez, tous, de quoi rire.

CORNEILLE.

1606—1684.

There is something forcible and majestic attached to the name of the father of French tragedy. As Æschylus displayed a sublime energy before the beauty of Sophocles, and the tenderness of Euripides threw gentler graces over the Greek theatre, so (if we may compare aught French to the mightier Athenian), before Racine added elegance and pathos, did Corneille, in heroic verse and majestic situation, impart a dignity and simplicity to the French drama afterwards wholly lost. We know little of him — a sort of shadowy indistinctness confounds the course of his life; but in the midst of this obscurity we trace the progress of a master mind — a man greater than his works, and yet not so great; who conceived ideas more sublime than any he executed, and who yet was held back from achieving all of which he might have been capable by a certain narrowness of taste. Had Corneille been English or Spanish, unfettered by French dramatic rules, unweakened by the jejune powers of French verse, his talent had shown itself far more mighty. As it is, however imperfect his plays may be, we admire the genius of the man far more than that of his successors, as displayed in the same career. It has been observed, that Shakspeare himself never portrayed a hero — a man mastering fate through the force of virtue. Corneille has done this; and some of his verses are instinct with an heroic spirit worthy a language more capable of expressing them.

Pierre Corneille, master of waters and forests in the viscounty of Rouen, and Marthe Le Pesant, a lady of noble family, were the parents of the poet, Pierre Cor-

neille, surnamed the great. They had two other children; Thomas, who followed his brother's career, and was a dramatic author; and Marthe, who also shared the talents of this illustrious family. She was consulted by her brother, who read his plays to her before they were acted. She married, and was the mother of Fontenelle, the author. Pierre was a pupil of the Jesuits of Rouen, and always preserved feelings of gratitude towards that society. He was educated for the bar, but neither displayed taste for, nor obtained any success in, this career; while the spirit of the age and his own genius pointed out another, in which he acquired high renown.

The civil dissensions which had hitherto desolated France prevented the cultivation of the refined arts. Henry IV. bestowed peace on his country; but the men of his day, brought up in the lap of war, were rough and unlettered. It is generally found that national struggles develope, in the first instance, warriors and statesmen; and, when these are at an end, intellectual activity, finding no stage for practical exertion, turns itself to the creation of works of the imagination. Thus, at least, it was in Rome, where Virgil and Horace succeeded to Cato and Cæsar;—thus in France, where Corneille and Fenelon replaced Sully and his hero king. The influence of Henry IV. had been exerted to raise men fitted for the arts of government—that of Richelieu, to depress them. In the midst of the peace of desolation, bestowed by this minister on his country, which crushed all generous ardour for liberty or political advancement, the arts had birth; and the cardinal had not only sufficient discernment to encourage them in others, but entertained the ambition of shining himself. The theatre as yet did not exist in France; monastic exhibitions, mysteries and pageants, had been in vogue, which displayed neither invention nor talent. By degrees the French gathered some knowledge of the Spanish stage—the true source of modern drama, but they imitated them badly. The total want of merit in the plays of Hardy has condemned them to entire oblivion; and the dramas of Richelieu, though

mended and patched by the best authors in Paris, were altogether execrable: but the spirit was born and spread abroad. Pierre Corneille, in the provincial town of
1629. Ætat. 23. Rouen, imbibed it, and was incited to write. His first play was a comedy called "Melite." The plot was simple enough, and suggested by an incident that occurred to himself. A friend who was in love, and met with no return, introduced Corneille to the lady, and asked him to write a sonnet, addressed to her, in his name. The young poet found greater favour in the lady's eyes, and became a successful rival; and this circumstance, which he mixed up with others less credible, forms the plot of "Melite." "This," writes Corneille, "was my coup d'essai. It is not in the rules, for I did not then know that such existed. Common sense was my only guide, added to the example of Hardy. The success of my piece was wonderful; it caused the establishment of a new company of players in Paris; it equalled the best which had then appeared, and made me known at court." The comedy itself has slight merit, and reads dully. Perhaps the spectators felt this, for it had its critics. Corneille made a journey to Paris to see it acted. He there heard that the action of a play ought to be confined within the space of twenty-four hours; and he heard the meagerness of his plot and the familiarity of the lan-
1634. Ætat. 28. guage censured. As a sort of bravado, to show what he could do, he undertook to write a tragedy full of events, all of which should occur during the space of twenty-four hours, and raised the language to a sort of tragic elevation, while he took no pains to tax his genius to do its best. At this time Corneille neither understood the basis on which theatrical interest rests (the struggle of the passions), nor had he acquired that force of expression which elevates him above all other French dramatic writers. He went on writing plays whose mediocrity renders them absolutely unreadable, and produced six comedies, which met with great success, as being the best which had then appeared, but which are now neither read nor acted. Thus brought into notice, he became

one among five authors who corrected the plays of cardinal de Richelieu. His associates were L'Etoile, Boisrobert, Colletet, and Rotrou; of whom the last only was a man of genius, and he alone appreciated Corneille's merit. The others envied and depreciated him. They were joined in this sort of cabal by men of greater talent, and who ranked as the first literati of the day. Scuderi and Mairet both attacked him; and at last he had the misfortune to awaken the ill feelings of the cardinal-minister-author. Richelieu had caused a play to be 1635.
acted at his palace, called the "Comedie des Tuileries," Ætat.
the scenes of which he himself arranged. Corneille 29.
ventured, unbidden, to alter something in the third act. Two of his associates represented this as an impertinence; and the cardinal reproved him, saying, that it was necessary to have "un esprit de suite," or an orderly mind, meaning a cringing one. This circumstance probably disgusted Corneille with his occupation of corrector to greatness; for, under the pretext that his presence was required at Rouen for the management of his little property, he retired from his subaltern employment.

Another reason may have induced him to take up his principal abode at Rouen. The same lady who inspired the first conception of "Melite" continued to have paramount influence over his thoughts. Her name was madame du Pont; she was wife of a maitre des comptes of Rouen, and perfectly beautiful. This was the serious and enduring passion of his life. He addressed many love poems to her, which he always refused to publish, and burnt two years before his death. She first inspired him with the love of poetry; and her secret admiration for his productions rendered him eager to write.* His genius was industrious and prolific.

* "J'ai brulé fort longtemps d'une amour assez grande,
Et que jusqu'au tombeau je dois bien estimer,
Puisque ce fut par-là que j'appris à rimer.
Mon bonheur commença quand mon ame fut prise.
Je gagnai de la gloire en perdant ma franchise.
Charmé de deux beaux yeux, mon vers charma la cour;
Et ce que j'ai de nom je le dois à l'amour.
J'adorai donc Phylis, et la secrète estime

We have few traces to denote that Corneille was a scholar. However, of course, he read Latin, and Seneca furnished him with the idea of a tragedy on the subject of Medea. The "Sophonisba" of Mairet was the only regular tragedy that had appeared on the French stage. Corneille aspired to classic correctness in this new play;
1635. but his piece met with little success. It was a cold imita-
Ætat. tion of a bad original — the interest was null. Corneille
29. was afterwards aware of its defects, and speaks openly of them when he subsequently printed it. After "Medea" he wrote another comedy, in his old style, called "The Illusion." It is strange that a writer whose merit consists in energy and grandeur should have spent his youth in writing tame and mediocre comedies.

At length Corneille broke through the sort of cloud which so long obscured his genius and his glory. And let not the French ever forget that he owed his initiation into true tragic interest to the Spanish drama. Difference of manners, religion, and language renders the heroic subjects, which are so sublime and vehement in their native Greek dress, in modern plays either tame expositions of book learning, or false pictures, in which Frenchmen take ancient names, but express modern sentiments. Spanish poets at once escaped from these trammels: they portrayed men such as they knew them to be; they represented events such as they witnessed; they depicted passions such as they felt warm in their own hearts; and Corneille, by recurring to these writers,

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Que ce divin esprit faisait de notre rime,
Me fit devenir poëte aussitôt qu'amoureux :
Elle eut mes premiers vers, elle eut mes premiers feux ;
Et bien que maintenant cette belle inhumaine
Traite mon souvenir avec un peu de haine,
Je me trouve toujours en état de l'aimer ;
Je me sens tout ému quand je l'entends nommer ;
Et par le doux effet d'une prompte tendresse,
Mon cœur, sans mon aveu, reconnait sa maîtresse.
Après beaucoup de vœux et de soumissions,
Un malheur rompt le cours de nos affections ;
Mais tout mon amour en elle consommée,
Je ne vois rien d'aimable après l'avoir aimée ;
Aussi n'aimé-je plus, et nul objet vainqueur
N'a possédé depuis ma veine ni mon cœur."

CORNEILLE. — *Poésies Diverses.*

at once entered into the spirit of stage effect and interest, and opened to his countrymen a career, which, if they and he had had discernment to follow, might have raised them far higher in the history of modern drama. The incongruities of the Spanish theatre are, it is true, numerous; and, in following their example, much was to be avoided, both in plot and dialogue. Corneille felt this; but, in some degree, he fell into the opposite extreme.

An Italian secretary of the queen, Mary d'Medici, named Chalons, having retired to Rouen, advised Corneille to learn Spanish, and pointed out the "Cid" of Guillen de Castro as affording an admirable subject for a drama.* There are several old Spanish romances which narrate the history of the blow received by the father of the Cid from the Count Lozano — the death of the former by the youthful hand of the avenging son — and the subsequent demand which Ximena, daughter of Lozano, makes the king of the hand of Rodrigo. The Spanish poet saw that, by interweaving the idea of a prior attachment between Rodrigo and Ximena, the struggle of passion that must ensue, ere she could consent to marry the slayer of her father, presented a grand, deeply moving subject for a drama. Corneille followed closely in Guillen de Castro's steps: he rejected certain puerilities adopted by the Spaniard from the ancient ballads of their country, which were venerable in Spain, but might excite ridicule in France; but he at the same time injured his subject by too much attention to French rules. The senseless notion of unity of time takes away from the probability of the circumstances; and that which becomes natural after a lapse of years, is monstrous when crowded into twenty-four hours; so that we repeat Scuderi's exclamation, "How actively his personages were employed!" The French rule of having but two or three persons on the stage at a time detracts from the spirited scene, where, in the Spanish play, the nobles quarrel, and the blow is given at the council board

* See Voltaire's preface to his Commentary on the Cid, and also the admirable account of Guillen de Castro, by Lord Holland.

of the sovereign. Corneille mentions one or two defects himself, which show rather his erroneous notions than defects in his play. Speaking of the weakness of purpose and want of power which the king displays as a fault, he says, no king ought to be introduced but as powerful and prudent; though he gives no reason why a dramatic sovereign should be an abstract idea, instead of an historic and real personage. When the king, in Guillen de Castro, shows himself as he was, the lord paramount of turbulent feudal nobles, whom he was unable to control, and yet to whom he will not yield, and exclaims —

> "Rey soy mal obecido,
> Castigarè mis vasallos!"—

we see at once the various motives of action which rendered him eager to crush a quarrel between two influential families by uniting them in marriage. Corneille makes the scene take place at Seville, a city not in possession of the Spaniards till many years after. Certainly, the countryman of Shakspeare have no right to be severe on anachronisms; but the reason Corneille gives for his choice of place displays slender knowledge of the ancient state of a neighbouring country, or even of its geography. He says he does it to make the sudden incursion of the Moors, and the unprepared state of the king, more probable, by causing the attack to come by sea; when, in fact, in those days the boundaries of the warring powers were so uncertain, and the inroads so predatory, that nothing was more frequent than unforeseen invasions; and, besides, Seville is on the Guadalquivir, and several miles from the coast.

The real interest of the play, resting on the position of Rodrigo, who, despite his affection for Ximena, avenges his father, and of the miserable daughter, who feels her attachment for her lover survive the death of her parent, and the mutual struggles that ensue, overpowers these minor defects, aided as it is by powerful language and energy of passion. The success of the tragedy was unprecedented. it was received with enthusiasm in Paris, and all France re-echoed the praise, till a sort of epidemic transport

was spread through the country. It became a national phrase to applaud any thing or person by calling them as excellent as the Cid (*beau comme de Cid*); the name spread through the world; translations of the play were made in all languages; a knowledge of it became incorporated with all minds. "I knew two men," says Fontenelle, in his life of Corneille, "a soldier and a mathematician, who had never heard of any other play that had ever been written; but the name of the Cid had penetrated even the barbarous state in which they lived."

So much renown of course inspired his would-be rivals with rancour; they tried to detract from the merit of the successful play, and to show that at least it *ought* not to have succeeded. Scuderi published a bitter and elaborate attack, remarkable chiefly for the entire ignorance it displays of all the real springs of human passion and human interest. He calls Chimene a monster, and speaks of "the odious struggle of love and honour." He appealed to the French academy to decide on the justice of his criticism. The academy, not long before instituted by the cardinal de Richelieu, penetrated the minister's annoyance at Corneille's success, and his wish to have a rival crushed; so they by no means liked to come forward in defence of the poet; nor, on the other hand, did they relish the invidious task of pronouncing against him; they signified, therefore, that they should remain silent, unless invited by the author himself to decide on his merits. The cardinal, eager for a blow against the young poet, commissioned Corneille's intimate friend Boisrobert to write to him at Rouen on the subject. Corneille evaded giving an assent, on the score that the task in question was unworthy to occupy the academy; but, pressed by reiterated letters, he at last replied, that the academy could do as it liked; adding, "and as you say that his eminence would be glad to see their decision, and be diverted by it, I can have no objection." On this, Richelieu urged the academy to its task. Three of their number, De Bourzey, Des Marets, and Chapelain, were commissioned to draw up

a judgment: each performed his work apart; and Chapelain cooked it into form, and presented it to the cardinal for his approbation. Richelieu wrote his observations in the margin, and his grudge against the poet suggested at least one ill-natured one. The academy, as an excuse for their criticisms, remarked, that the discussions concerning the greatest works, the "Jerusalem" of Tasso, and the "Pastor Fido," tended to improve the art of poetry. Richelieu observed on this, "The praise and blame of the 'Cid' is a dispute between the learned and the ignorant, while the discussions on the other works mentioned were between clever men."* The work of the academy was, however, not over. The cardinal recommended that a few handsful of flowers should be scattered over Chapelain's criticism; but, when these flowers were added, he found them far too fragrant and ornamental, and had them plucked up and
1637. thrown away. After a good deal of discussion, and
Ætat. five months' labour, the judgment of the academy was
31. got up and printed. Scuderi hailed it as a sentence in his favour: Corneille was not so well pleased; but, after some indecision, he resolved to abstain from all reply. Such a course was the most dignified; and he excused the failure of respect it might show to the academy on the score that it marked a higher degree towards the cardinal.

He never, it may be believed, forgot the cardinal's ill offices on this occasion, though his fear of offending caused him to dedicate his play of "Horace" to him in an
1639. adulatory address. This tragedy shows a considerable
Ætat. advance in the power of expressing noble and heroic
33. sentiments. The framework is too slight, being the duel of the Horatii and the Curiatii, and the subsequent murder of his sister by the surviving Horatius, when

* Voltaire says that he gives the cardinal credit for good faith in this remark, since he saw and felt the defects of the "Cid." Voltaire was himself accused of envy on account of the mass of criticism he accumulated on Corneille, and was glad to show toleration for that which he desired to be tolerated. Both, probably, were sincere in their blame. The question is, how far covert envy (unacknowledged even to themselves) opened their eyes to defects, which otherwise had passed unnoticed.

she reproached him for slaying her betrothed. Such a subject in the hands of Shakspeare had not, indeed, been threadbare. He would have brought the jealousies of the states of Rome and Alba in living scenes before our eyes. We should have beheld the collision of turbulent, ambitious spirits, and felt that the world was not large enough for both. The pernicious rule of unity of time and place prevented this: the ambition of Rome could be displayed only in the single person of Horatius. All we have, therefore, are various scenes between him, his sister, his wife, and the Curiatius, betrothed to the former, and brother to the latter; and these scenes are, for the most part, repetitions one of another; for the same rules confining the time of action, restrict the whole play to the delineation of the catastrophe; variety of incident and feeling is excluded, and the art of the French dramatist consists principally in petty devices, to delay the catastrophe, and so to drag it through long *téte-à-téte* conversations, till the fifth act: often they are unable to defer it beyond the fourth, and then the fifth is an appendix of little account.

"Horace" is, however, a masterpiece. Corneille could speak as a Roman, and the character of the hero is conceived with a simplicity and severity of taste worthy of his country.

In his next piece Corneille rose yet higher. "Cinna" is usually considered his *chef d'œuvre*. It contains admirable scenes, unsurpassed by any author. Did the scene in which Augustus asks the advice of Cinna and Maximus as to his meditated abdication pass between the personages (Mecænas and Agrippa) who really were called into consultation on the subject, it had been faultless. The mixture of admirable reasoning, covert and delicate flattery, forcible eloquence, and happy versification, is perhaps unequalled in any work that exists. It is, to a degree, spoiled as it stands; for the false part which the conspirators act, and the peculiarly base conduct of Cinna, deteriorate from the interest of the whole drama; and, although in subsequent portions of

the play he appears in the more interesting light of a man struggling between remorse and love, we cannot recover from the impression, and thus the character wants that congruity and likelihood necessary for an ideal hero. As works of art, we may say, once for all, Corneille's tragedies are far from perfect. Very inferior poets have attained happier combinations of plot: but not one among his countrymen — few of any nation — have equalled him in scenes; in declamations full of energy and poetry; in single expressions that embody the truth of passion and the result of a life of experience; in noble sentiments, such as made the great Condé weep from admiration. In this play he did not happily confine himself to absolute unity of place. Such was his erroneous notion that he mentions this, as a fault; while Voltaire drolly, yet seriously, observes that unity of place had been preserved had the stage represented two apartments at once. How far this would have helped the imagination it is impossible to say; but in real life no spectator commands a view of the interior of two separate rooms at once, except, indeed, in a penitentiary.

1640. Ætat. 34. The tragedies that followed "Cinna" continued to sustain the reputation of the poet. "Polyeucte," which succeeded to it the following year, is, perhaps, the most delightful of all his plays. I know no other work of the imagination in which a woman, loving one man and marrying another, preserves at once dignity and sweetness. Pauline loves Severus with all the enthusiasm of a girl's first passion; — she fears to see him again, so well does she remember the power of that love; but, though she fears, she does not lament: we perceive that conjugal tenderness for a young and virtuous husband, a sense of duty, hallowed by purity of feeling and softened by affection, have gathered over the ruins of a former attachment for another, while the heroism and generosity of Severus adds dignity to the character of her who once loved him so fondly. The only fault that strikes at all forcibly in this piece is a sort of

brusquerie, or want of keeping, in the character of the martyr. The tragedy opens with his wishing to defer the sacrament of baptism because his wife had had a bad dream; and, after this, we are not prepared for his sudden resolution to overthrow the altars of his country, and to devote himself on the instant to martyrdom. The poet meant that we should feel this increase of fervour as the effect of baptism; but he has somewhat failed, by not making us expect it: and to raise expectation, so that no event should appear startling, is the great art of dramatic writing. The real fault is in the senseless notion of unity of time: had the author given his personages space to breathe, all had been in harmony. It must not be omitted, that when Corneille read this play, before its representation, to an assembly of *beaux esprits,* at the hotel de Rambouillet, the learned conclave came to the decision that it would not succeed, and deputed Voiture to persuade the author to withdraw it, as christianity introduced on the stage had offended many. Corneille, frightened at this sentence, endeavoured to get it out of the hands of the actors, but was persuaded by one among them to let it take its chance.* The fine people of Paris could not imagine that a christian martyr would command the interest and sympathy of an audience. Where the scene, however, is founded on truth and nature, the hearts of the listeners are carried away; and Corneille could always command admiration for his heroes, through the power of the situations he conceived, and the elevation and beauty of his language.

Corneille again attempted a comedy. Voltaire justly observes, that the French owe their first tragedy and their first comedy of character to the Spanish. The "Menteur" of Corneille is taken from "El Verdad sospechosa" of Lope de Vega; and bears marks of its Spanish origin in the intricacy of its intrigue, and its love-making out of window, so usual in Spain, and unnatural elsewhere. This comedy had the greatest success;

* Fontenelle.

many of the verses passed into sayings — the very situations became proverbs. "The Liar" had just arrived from Poictiers; and it grew into a fashion, when any man told an incredible story, to ask whether he had come from Poictiers?

1646. Ætat. 40 "Rodogune," which succeeded, is (with the lamentable defect of the unlucky unity of time and place) more like a Spanish or an English play than any other of Corneille's, except the "Cid." The very intricacy and faults of the plot, founded, as it is, on some old forgotten tale, give it the same wild romantic interest. Corneille, indeed, says he took the story from Appian and other historical sources; but, as the tale existed, perhaps he saw that first, and then consulted the ancient authorities. Voltaire, in his remarks, scarcely knows what to say to it. It succeeded brilliantly, kept possession of the stage, and always ranks as one of Corneille's best tragedies. He is forced, therefore, to acknowledge its merit, although the fault in the conduct and story struck him forcibly. He repeats, perpetually, "The pit was pleased; so we must allow this play to have merit, though there is so much in it to shock an enlightened critic." Corneille himself favoured this tragedy with particular regard. "I have often been asked at court," he says, "which of my poems I preferred; and I found all those who questioned me so partial either to 'Cinna' or the 'Cid,' that I never dared declare all the tenderness I felt for this one, to which I would willingly have given my suffrage, had I not feared to fail in some degree in the respect I owed to those who inclined the other way. My preference is, perhaps, the result of one of those blind partialities which fathers sometimes feel for one child rather than another: perhaps some self-love mingles with it, since this tragedy seems to me more entirely my own than any of its predecessors, on account of its surprising incidents, which are all my own invention, and which had never before been witnessed on the stage; and, finally, perhaps a little real merit renders this partiality not entirely unjust." Fontenelle

mentions, as another cause for it, the labour he bestowed; since he spent a year in meditating the subject. There might be another reason, to which neither Corneille nor his biographer allude — that this play occasioned him a triumph over a rival. Gilbert brought out a tragedy on the same subject a few months before: as it is acknowledged that Corneille's was written first, he, perhaps, heard of the subject, and took the details from the novel in question. However that may be, Gilbert's play was never acted a second time; yet it met with powerful patrons in its fall, and was published, with a flourishing dedication to the king's brother; but nothing could preserve it from oblivion. The German critics are particularly severe on "Rodogune," and with some justice: there is want of nature in the situations and sentiments; we are attached to none of the characters; and the heroine herself is utterly insignificant.

Corneille had now reached the acme of his fame. Other plays succeeded, which did not deserve the name of tragedies, but ought, as Voltaire remarks, to be entitled heroic comedies.* These pieces were of unequal merit; having here and there traces of the great master's hand, but defective as wholes. Usually, he introduces one character of power and interest that elevates them, and which, when filled by a good actor, rendered them successful; but they were not hailed with the enthusiasm that attended his earlier plays. The great Condé looked cold on "Don Sancho," and it was heard of no more; while the fastidious taste of the French revolted from the subject of "Theodore." Worse overthrow was in store. "Pertharite," founded on a Lombard story, failed altogether; and its ill fortune, he tells us, so disgusted him as to induce him to retreat entirely from the theatre. He turned his thoughts to other works. He

* It is curious enough that such pieces often replace the higher tragedy with great effect in days when poetry is at a low ebb, and an audience desires rather to be amused than deeply moved. Such at this time are the delightful dramas of Sheridan Knowles, such the charming "Lady of Lyons," which portray the serious romance of real life, and impart the interest of situation and character, without pretending to the sublime terrors or pathos of heroic tragedy.

wrote his "Essays on the Theatre," which contain much acute and admirable criticism; though, like all French writers on that subject, he misses the real subject of discussion. He translated, also, the "Imitation of Jesus Christ" into French — being persuaded to this design by the jesuits. He fails, as our poets are apt to fail, when they versify the psalms; the dignified simplicity of the original being lost in the frippery of modern rhyme.

It had been happy for Corneille had he adhered to his resolves to write no more for the theatre. But M. Fouquet, the celebrated and unfortunate minister of finances to Louis XIV., caused him to break it. Fouquet begged him to dramatise one of three subjects which he mentioned. Corneille chose Œdipus, "Its success," he writes, "compensated to me for the failure of the other; since the king was sufficiently pleased to cause me to receive solid testimonials of his satisfaction; and I took his liberality as a tacit order to consecrate to the amusement of his majesty all the invention and power which age and former labours had spared." This was a melancholy resolve — his subsequent plays were not worthy of their predecessors. They contain fine scenes and eloquent passages; but a hard dry spirit crept over him, which caused him to mistake exaggerated sentiments for nobleness of soul. The plots, also, were bad; the conduct enfeebled by uninteresting episodes, or by the worse expedient of giving the hero himself some under amatory interest that lowered him entirely. Voltaire remarks, "Corneille's genius was still in force. He ought to have been severe on himself, or to have had severe friends. A man capable of writing fine scenes might have written a good play. It was a great misfortune that no one told him that he chose his subjects badly." It is sad to be obliged to make excuses for genius. No doubt Corneille failed in invention as he grew older. His former power of boldness and felicity of expression often shed rays of light upon his feebler works; but he could no longer conceive a whole, whose parts

should be harmonious, whose entire effect should be sublime.

The bounty of the king in bestowing a pension on him, it is probable, was one cause of his establishing himself in Paris, and his brother's recent success as a dramatist a yet more urgent one. Hitherto Corneille had resided at Rouen, visiting the capital only at intervals, when he brought out any new play. In 1642 he had been elected member of the French academy; but that circumstance caused no change in his mode of life. He was not formed to shine at court, nor in the gay Parisian circles. Simple, almost rustic, in his manners and appearance, his genius was not discernible to the casual observer. " The first time I saw him," says a writer of the day, " I took him for a merchant of Rouen — his exterior gave no token of his talents, and he was slow, and even dull, in conversation." Corneille certainly neglected the refinements of society too much; or, rather, nature, who had been so liberal to him in rich gifts, had withheld minor ones. When his familiar friends, who desired to see him perfect, spoke to him of his defects, he replied with a smile, " I am not the less Pierre Corneille." La Bruyere bears the same testimony: " Simple and timid; tiresome in conversation — he uses one word for another — he knows not how to recite his own verses." *

In truth, Corneille's merit did not, as with many Frenchmen, lie on the surface. Conscious of his own desert, ambitious of glory, proud, yet shy, he shrunk from society where all excellence is despised that does not sparkle and amuse. We are inclined to believe from these considerations that his migration to Paris is attributable rather to his brother than to himself.

* Corneille gives much the same account of himself in some verses written in his youth, and which he calls a slight picture of himself: —

" En matière d'amour je suis fort inégal;
J'en ecris assez bien, et le fais assez mal;
J'ai la plume féconde, et la bouche sterile:
Bon galant au théâtre, et fort mauvais en villé;
Et l'on peut rarement m' écouter sans ennui;
Que quand je me produis par la bouche d'autrui."

Thomas Corneille was twenty years the junior. The brothers had married two sisters of the name of De Lampériere, between whom existed the same difference of age. The family was united by all the bonds of affection and virtue. Their property, even, was in common; and it was not until after Corneille's death that the inheritance of their wives was divided, and that each sister received her share. The brothers were fondly attached, and lived under the same roof. We are told that Thomas wrote verses with much greater facility than Pierre, and he well might, considering what his verses are; and, when Pierre wanted a rhyme, he opened a trap door communicating with his brother's room, and asked him to give one. Nor was Pierre less attached to his sister, to whom he was accustomed to read his pieces when written. She had good taste and an enlightened judgment, and was worthy of her relationship to the poet.

Thomas Corneille had lately met with success in the same career as his brother. His play of "Timocrates" was acted for six months together; and the king went to the unfashionable theatre of the Marais, at which it was brought out, for the purpose of seeing it. Nothing could be more dissimilar than the productions of the brothers. Thomas Corneille had merit, and one or two of his plays ("Le Comte d'Essex" in particular) kept possession of the stage: he had, however, knack instead of genius. He could contrive interesting situations to amuse the audience; but his verses are tame, his dialogue trivial, his conceptions altogether mediocre. Still, in its day, success is success, and, under its influence, the younger Corneille aspired to the delights of a brilliant career in the capital.

1662. Ætat. 56. The establishment of the family in Paris is ascertained by a procuration or power of attorney given by the brothers, empowering a cousin to manage their affairs at Rouen. Corneille seemed to feel the change as a new spur to exertion; but, unfortunately, invention no longer waited on industry, as of old. Considering it

his duty to write for the stage, he brought out piece after piece, in which he mistook involved intrigue for interest, crime on stilts for heroism, and declamation for passion. His tragedies fell coldly on the public ear; and, as he could not understand why this should be, he always alleges some trivial circumstance as the cause of his ill success; for, having laboured as sedulously as in his early plays, he was insensible to the fact, that arid though pompous dialogues were substituted for sublime eloquence. Boileau's epigram on these unfortunate testimonies of decayed genius is well known: — when the wits of Paris repeated after him

> " J'ai vu l'Agésilas;
> Hélas!
> Mais après Attila,
> Hola!"

Corneille might well regret that he had not persevered in the silence to which he condemned himself when Pertharite failed.

A young rival also sprung up — a rival whose graceful diction, whose impassioned tenderness, and elegant correctness, are the delight of French critics to this day. Yet, though Voltaire and others have set Racine far above Corneille, and though Saint Evremond wrote at the time that the advanced age of Corneille no longer alarmed him, since the French drama would not die with him, the younger poet's superiority was by no means universally acknowledged in his own time. Corneille had a party who still adhered to their early favourite, and called Racine's elegance feebleness, compared with the rough sublimity of the father of the art. " Racine writes agreeably," says madame de Sévigné, in a letter to her daughter; " but there is nothing absolutely beautiful, nothing sublime — none of those tirades of Corneille which thrill. We must never compare him with Racine; but be aware of the difference. We must excuse Corneille's bad verses in favour of those divine and sublime beauties which fill us with transport — these are traits of genius which are quite inimitable. Despréaux

says even more than me, — in a word, this is good taste; let us preserve it." If, therefore, Corneille had ceased to write, if he had let his nobler tragedies remain as trophies of past victory, and not aimed at new, he might have held a proud position, guarded by numerous partisans, who exalted him far above his rival. But he continued to write, and he was unsuccessful — thus it became a living struggle, in which he had the worst. He did not like to appear envious: he felt what he said, and he said justly, that Racine's Greek or Mahometan heroes were but Frenchmen with ancient or Turkish names; but he was aware that this remark might be considered invidious. Yet he could not conceal his opinion, nor the offence he took, when Racine transplanted a verse from the Cid into his comedy of The "Plaideurs" —

"Ses rides sur son front ont gravés ses exploits."

"It ill becomes a young man," he said, "to make game of other people's verses." It was still worse when he was seduced into what the French have named a duel with Racine. Henrietta, daughter of our Charles I., wife of the brother of Louis XIV., was a principal patroness of men of genius; — her talents, her taste, her accomplishments; the generosity and kindness of her disposition, made her respected and loved. Louis and she had been attached to one another; their mutual position forced them to subdue the passion; but their triumph over it was not achieved without struggles, which, no doubt, appeared romantic and even tragical to the poor princess. She wished this combat to be immortalised; and, finding in the loves and separation of Titus and Berenice a similarity with her own fate, she deputed the marquis de Dangeau to engage Corneille and Racine, unknown to one another, each to write a tragedy on this subject — not a very promising one at best — and still more difficult on the French stage, where the catastrophe alone forms the piece. But Racine conquered these difficulties; — tenderness and truth of passion interested in

place of incident—the audience wept—and criticism was mute. Corneille floundered miserably: love with him is always an adjunct and an episode, but not the whole subject: it helps as a motive—it is never the end. He fancied that his young rival was angry with him for competing with him; and he gave signs of a querulousness which he had no right to feel*; but there is something so *naive* in his self praises, and such ingenuousness in his repinings, that we look on them as traits portraying the simplicity and singleness of his character, rather than as marks of vanity or invidiousness.

After "Berenice," he wrote two other plays, "Pulcherie" and "Surena," and then, happily, gave up composition. Though he saw the pieces of his young rival hailed with delight, he had the gratification of knowing that his own *chef-d'œuvres* were often acted with applause, that the best critics regarded them with enthusiasm, and that his position was firmly established as the father of French tragedy. He lived to a considerable age; and his mind became enfeebled during the last year of his life. He died on the 1st September, 1584, in the seventy-ninth year of his age.

There is a harmony between the works of Corneille and his character, which his contemporaries, who appreciated only the brilliant, mistook, but which strikes forcibly. He was proud and reserved. Though his dedications are phrased according to the adulatory ceremonial of the day, his conduct was always dignified and independent. He seldom appeared at court, where his lofty, though simple, character found nothing to attract. He was, besides, careless of the gifts of fortune: he detested the cares of property, shrinking, with terror, from such details. Serious, and even melancholy, trifles had no charms for him: dramatic

* See his "Excuse à Ariste." In another place he says,—

"Si mes quinze lustres
Font encore quelque peine aux modernes illustres;
S'il en est de facheux jusqu'à se chagriner,
Je n'aurai pas long-temps à les importuner."

composition absorbed his whole thoughts; his studies tended to improvement in that vocation only. Straitforward and simple in manner,—his person, though tall, was heavy — his face was strongly marked and expressive — his eyes full of fire, — there was something in the whole man that bespoke strength, not grace — yet a strength full of dignity.

His fortunes were low. The trifling pension allowed him by Cardinal Richelieu expired with that minister. Many years afterwards, Louis XIV. granted him a pension of 2000 francs as the first dramatic poet of the world. He was wholly indifferent to gain; the actors paid him what they pleased for his pieces; he never called them to account. He lived frugally, but had little to live on. A few days before his death his family were in considerable straits for want of money, and the king, hearing of this, sent him 200 louis.

In these traits, recorded chiefly by his brother and his nephew, Fontenelle, we see the genuine traces of a poet. Of a man whose heart is set on the ideal, and whose mind is occupied by conceptions engendered within itself — to whom the outward world is of slight account, except as it influences his imagination or excites his affections. The political struggles and civil wars, in which his youth was spent, gave a sort of republican loftiness to his mind, energy without fierceness, somewhat at variance with the French character.

Once, on entering a theatre at Paris, after a longer retreat than usual in his native town, the actors stopped short: the great Condé, the prince of Conti, together with the whole audience, rose: the acclamation was general and long continued. Such flattering testimonials embarrassed a man modest by nature, and unused to make a show of himself; but they evince the generous spirit of his country. Marks of veneration followed his death.

His character commanded and met with respect. He had long been the eldest member of the academy: on his death his brother was elected to succeed him.

Racine contended for the honour of receiving the new academician; on which occasion it was the custom to make a speech in praise of the late member whose place the new one took. Racine's eulogy on Corneille met with great applause, and he recited it a second time before the king. He spoke with enthusiasm of his merits, and, in particular, of "a certain strength, a certain elevation, which transports, and renders his very defects, if he had any, more venerable than the excellence of others." This testimony was honourable to Racine, who had, indeed, so heartfelt an appreciation of his best passages, that, although he interdicted dramas and poetry from his children, he caused them to learn, and taught them to admire, various scenes in Corneille. Many years after Voltaire discovered a descendant of the great poet*: he spread the discovery abroad; he invited the young lady to Ferney as to her home; and published for her benefit his two volumes of commentary on her great ancestor's works. This commentary has been found fault with for the degree of blame it contains. Voltaire says himself, he wrote it chiefly to instruct future dramatic poets, and he was sincere in his views, even if he were mistaken. It is chiefly remarkable for the extent of its verbal criticism, and his earnest endeavour to banish all familiar expressions from tragic dialogue, thus rendering French tragedies more factitious than ever. It is strange to remark the different genius of various languages. We endeavour perpetually to bring back ours to the familiar and antique Saxon. We regard our translation of the Bible as a precious treasure, even in this light, being a source to which all good writers resort for true unadulterated English. It has been remarked that the sublimest passages of our greatest poets are written in *short words*, that is, in Anglo-Saxon, or pure English. While Voltaire, on the contrary, tried to substitute words un-

* Corneille had three sons: two entered the army; the third became an ecclesiastic; one fell at the battle of Grave, in 1677; they all died without posterity. He had one daughter, from whom descended the family of Guenebaud.

used in conversation, strangers to the real living expression of passion, and which give a factitious and false air, peculiar to the French buskin, and alien to true elevation of language.

So much has been said of Corneille's tragedies in the preceding pages that we need scarcely revert to them. He originated the French theatre. It was yet in the block when he took up his artist-tools. We grieve at the mistakes he made — mistakes, as to the structure of the drama, confirmed by subsequent writers, which mark classic French tragedy as an artificial and contracted offspring of a school, instead of being the free and genuine child of nature and genius. Corneille's originality, however, often bursts through these trammels: he has more truth and simplicity than any of his successors, and, as well as being the father of the French drama, we may name him the most vigorous and sublime poet that France has produced.

ROCHEFOUCAULD.

1613 — 1680.

Grimm, in his correspondence, records, that it was a saying of d'Alembert, that, in life, "Ce n'est qu'heur et malheur," that it was all luck or ill luck. The same thing may be said of many books; and, perhaps, of none more than that which has given literary celebrity to François, duke de la Rochefoucauld. The experience of a long life, spent for the most part in the very nucleus of the intrigues of party and the artifices of a court, reduced into sententious maxims, affords food for curiosity, while it flatters our idleness. The most indolent person may read a maxim, and ponder on its truth, and be led to meditate, without any violent exertion of mind. In addition, knowledge of the world, as it is called, always interests. Voltaire says of the "Maxims," "Though there is but one truth in this collection, which is that self-love is the motive of all, yet this thought is presented under such various aspects that it is always impressive. If we considered the pervading opinion of the book theoretically, we might be inclined to parody this remark, and say, "though there is but one multiformed falsehood in this collection," — but we defer our consideration of the principles of this work till we have given an account of its author, who was no obscure man, meditating the lessons of wisdom in solitude, but the leader of a party, a soldier, a man of gallantry and of fashion; one such as is only produced, in its perfection, in a society highly cultivated; yet the foundations of his character were thrown in times of ignorance and turbulence.

The family of La Rochefoucauld is one of the noblest in France: it ranks equal with that of the sovereign,

and enjoyed almost monarchical power when residing on its own possessions; while its influence might give preponderance to the party it espoused, and even shake the throne. François, the eldest son of the duke then in possession, was born at his paternal castle of Rochefoucauld, in Angoumois, in 1613, two years subsequent to the assassination of Henry IV. He grew up, therefore, during the reign of Louis XIII., and first came to court during the height of cardinal de Richelieu's power. His education had been neglected. Madame de Maintenon said of him, in after times, that "his physiognomy was preposessing, his demeanour dignified; that he had great talent, and little knowledge." We have no details of his early life at court. He was the friend of the duchess de Chevreuse, favourite of the queen, Anne of Austria; and, when this lady was banished, the family of la Rochefoucauld fell into disgrace, and retired to the shelter of their estates.

But a few years before the nobles of France possessed greater power than the king himself. The short reign and wise administration of Henry IV. and Sully had infused a somewhat better spirit into the body politic of the kingdom than that which for forty years had torn the country with civil war; but the happy effects of that prosperous period were obliterated on the accession of Louis XIII. After a series of struggles, however, Richelieu became prime minister; and with unflinching courage, and resolute and merciless policy, he proceeded to crush the nobility, and to raise the monarchical power (invested, it may be said, in his own person,) into absolute rule. The nobles in those days did not plot to supplant each other in the favour of their royal master, nor to gain some place near the royal person; they aimed at supremacy over the king himself: reluctantly, and not without struggles that cost the lives and fortunes of many of the chief among them, did the nobles yield to the despotism of Richelieu. The mother of their sovereign was banished; his brother disgraced; his queen enslaved; the prisons filled with victims; the provinces with exiles; the

blood of many flowed: the cardinal reigned secure, and the power of the contending nobles was reduced to feudal command in their own domains.

At length Richelieu died; and, for a moment, his vanquished enemies fancied that their turn was come for acquiring dominion. The state prisons were thrown open; the exiles hastened to return. The friends of the family of la Rochefoucauld wrote to advise them to appear at court. The reigning duke and his sons immediately followed this counsel.* His eldest son was 1642.
called prince de Marsillac: his name and person were Ætat.
well known as the friend of the duchess of Chevreuse, 29.
and as a favourite of Anne of Austria. He has left us an account of that period, in which he details the high hopes of his party and subsequent disappointment. "The persecution I had suffered," he writes †, "during the power of the cardinal de Richelieu, having finished with his life, I thought it right to return to court. The ill health of the king, and the disinclination that he manifested to confide his children and kingdom to the queen, made me hope that I might soon find important occasions for serving her, and of giving her, in the present state of things, the same marks of attachment which she had received from me on all occasions when her interests, and those of madame de Chevreuse, were in opposition to those of cardinal de Richelieu. I arrived at court; and found it as submissive to his will after his death as during his life. His relations and his creatures continued to enjoy all the advantages they had gained through him; and by a turn of fortune, of which there are few examples, the king, who hated him, and desired his fall, was obliged, not only to conceal his sentiments, but even to authorise the disposition made by the cardinal in his will of the principal employments and most important places in his kingdom. He chose cardinal Mazarin to succeed him in the govern-

* Mémoires de Gourville.

† Mémoires de la Regence d'Anne d'Autriche, par le duc de la Rochefoucauld.

ment. Nevertheless, as the health of the king was deplorable, there was a likelihood that every thing would soon change, and that, the queen or monsieur (the duke of Orleans, brother to Louis XIII.) acquiring the regency, they would revenge on the followers of Richelieu the outrages they had received from himself."

Affairs, however, took a very different turn. Mazarin and others, the creatures of and successors to Richelieu, were less arrogant, less ambitious, and less resolute than their master. They were willing to acquire power by allying themselves to the adverse party. Mazarin, in particular, felt that, on the death of Louis XIII., he should not possess influence enough to cope with the persons who, by rank, were destined to the regency; and he perceived, at once, that it was his best policy to become the friend, instead of the rival, of the queen and the duke of Orleans. Anne of Austria saw safety in encouraging him in this conduct. Mazarin grew into a favourite, and supplanted those who had stood by her during her years of adversity. Thus, while the surface of things appeared the same, the spirit was changed. Rochefoucauld saw that the queen entertained new views and new partialities, and was supported by the same party by which she had been hitherto oppressed. As her friend, he perceived the advantages she gained by this line of conduct, and, by prudent concessions, retained her regard. When the king died, and she became regent, Mazarin had made himself necessary to her, for it was by his policy that the other members of the council of the regency were reduced to insignificance; so that the queen, entirely attached to him, anticipated with something of aversion the reappearance of madame de Chevreuse, who, on the death of Louis XIII., hastened
1643. to return to Paris. The prince of Marsillac perceived
Ætat. her apprehensions, and asked her permission to meet
30. madame de Chevreuse on her way, which the queen readily granted, hoping that the prince would dispose her former friend to seek the friendship of Mazarin. This was, indeed, Marsillac's purpose: he gave the fallen

favourite the best advice that prudence could suggest, and the duchess promised to follow it. In this she failed. She fancied that she could supplant the cardinal in the queen's favour; she acted with arrogance; and her imprudence insured her ruin.

Le bon temps de la régence followed. For five years France enjoyed external and internal prosperity. The former was insured by the battle of Rocroi, and other successes, obtained by the prince of Condé and Turenne, against the power of Spain. The latter was more fallacious. The intrigues, cabals, and dissensions of the court were carried on with virulence. Manners became every day more and more corrupt—the gulf between Mazarin and his antagonists wider. We have little trace of Marsillac's conduct during this interval. He followed the campaigns, and served gallantly in several actions. He was present at the siege of Mardike, in which he was wounded in the shoulder, which obliged him to return to Paris. He bought the governorship of Poitou, and took up his residence there. He visited Paris, but want of money prevented his remaining. His secretary, Gourville, lets us into a view of the corruption of the times, when he details how he enriched his master by only obtaining from Emery, the comptroller of the finances, a man of low extraction, whose extortion, luxuriousness, and debauchery disgusted the nation, a passport for a thousand tons of wheat, to be brought from Poitou to the capital; and the profit he gained by this transaction enabled the prince, to his infinite joy, to remain in Paris.

There can be little doubt that, at this time, he had immersed himself in political intrigue. Madame de Chevreuse was again banished; but affairs had taken another and more important aspect than mere intrigues and disputes among courtiers for royal favour. The extravagance of the court, and corruption of the times, had thrown the finances into disorder; and every means most subversive of the prosperity of the people, and of

justice, was resorted to by Emery to supply the royal treasury. The consequence was universal discontent. Parliament resisted the court by its decrees; the populace of Paris supported parliament; and a regular system of resistance to the regent and her minister was formed. This opposition received the name of the Fronde: the persons who formed it were called Frondeurs. These were bent, the duke de la Rochefoucauld tells us, in his memoirs, on arresting the course of the calamities at hand; having the same object, though urged by a different motive, as those who were instigated by hatred of the cardinal. At first the remonstrances of parliament, and the opposition of the court, was a war of words only; but when the court, enraged at any opposi-
1648. Ætat. 35. tion to its will, proceeded to arrest three principal members of parliament, the people of Paris rose in a body; the day of the barricades ensued, the members were set free, and the court forced to yield.

But the tumults did not end here: the celebrated De Retz, then coadjutor to the archbishop of Paris, who saw his towering ambition crushed by the distrust of the court, resolved to make himself feared; and, instead of permitting the spirit of sedition in the capital to subside, he excited it to its utmost. It became necessary for him, in the system of opposition that ensued, to secure some prince of the blood at the head of his party. His eyes turned towards the great Condé; but he continued faithful to the queen: the coadjutor was, therefore, forced to centre his hopes in this prince's younger brother, the prince of Conti. Rochefoucauld gives an account, in his memoirs, of the winning over of this prince. "The prince of Conti," he writes, "was ill satisfied at not possessing a place in the council, and even more at the neglect with which the prince of Condé treated him; and as he was entirely influenced by his sister, the duchess de Longueville, who was piqued at the indifference her elder brother displayed towards her, he abandoned himself without reserve to his resentment. This

princess, who had a great share afterwards in these affairs, possessed all the advantages of talent and beauty to so great a degree, joined to so many charms, that it appeared as if nature had taken pleasure in forming a perfect and finished work in her: but these qualities lost a part of their brilliancy through a defect which was never before seen in a person of this merit; which was that, far from giving the law to those who had a particular adoration for her, she transfused herself so entirely into their sentiments that she entirely forgot her own. At this time the prince de Marsillac had a share in her heart; and, as he joined his ambition to his love, he inspired her with a taste for politics, to which she had a natural aversion, and took advantage of her wish to revenge herself on the prince of Condé by opposing Conti to him. De Retz was fortunate in his project, through the sentiments entertained by the brother and sister, who allied themselves to the Frondeurs by a treaty, into which the duke de Longueville was drawn by his hopes of succeeding, through the help of parliament, in his ill-founded pretensions of being treated like a prince of the blood." *

The state of tumult and street warfare into which Paris was plunged by these intrigues at last determined the queen to the most desperate measures: she resolved to escape from the capital, with the young king, the car-

* It is well known that the history of the troubles of the Fronde is recounted by a variety of eye-witnesses, no two of which agree in their account of motives — scarcely of facts. Cardinal de Retz, in his memoirs, gives a somewhat different account of the adhesion of madame de Longueville to his party. It is singular to remark how each person in his relation makes himself the prime mover. Rochefoucauld makes us to almost understand that he drew over the princess to the Fronde. The cardinal tells us that, seeing madame de Longueville one day by chance, he conceived a hope, soon realised, of bringing her over to his party. He tells us that at that time M. de la Rochefoucauld was attached to her. He was living at Poitou; but came to Paris about three weeks afterwards; and thus Rochefoucauld and De Retz were brought together. The former had been accused of deserting his party, which rendered De Retz at first disinclined to join with him; but these accusations were unfounded, and necessity brought them much together. The cardinal allows that madame de Longueville had no natural love for politics, — she was too indolent; — anger, arising from her elder brother's treatment, first led her to wish to oppose his party; gallantry led her onward; and this causing party spirit to be but the second of her motives, instead of being a heroine, she became an adventuress.

dinal, and the whole court, and then to blockade it. In this plan she succeeded, through her admirable presence of mind and fearlessness. The court retreated to St. Germain. Here they were unprovided even with necessaries. They lived in disfurnished apartments, they slept on straw, and were exposed to a thousand hardships. The prince of Conti, and Marsillac, and the duke de Longueville followed the court. De Retz was confounded by their retreat; and sent the marquis de Noirmoutier to learn the cause of their secession, and, if possible, to bring them back. The motive of these princes in apparently deserting their party was, it would seem, to further their own private interests.* Marsillac left his secretary, Gourville, behind, to negotiate with the leading members of parliament for the electing the prince of Conti generalissimo of the Parisian troops. When this transaction was arranged, the princes determined on their return to the capital. It was a matter of danger and difficulty to escape from St. Germain. When the method of so doing was arranged, Marsillac held a long conversation with Gourville, telling him what account he was to carry to Paris, in case he should be made prisoner, in which case he felt sure that he should be decapitated. Gourville, however, begged him to write his last instructions, as he was resolved to share his fortunes to the last. Their attempt, however, was attended with success: the adventurers made good their entrance into Paris; and, after some opposition, gained their point, principally through the appearance of the beautiful duchesses de Bouillon and Longueville, who presented themselves before the people of Paris with their children, and excited a commotion in their favour. The prince of Conti was elected generalissimo.

Meanwhile Condé blockaded the metropolis; and the volunteers of Paris, composed of its citizens, poured out to resist the blockade. The warfare was of the most

* Rochefoucauld's Mémoires; Mémoires de Gourville; James's Life and Times of Louis XIV.

ridiculous kind: the people of Paris made a jest of their own soldiery, which excelled only in the talent of running away. These troops went to the field by thousands, dressed out in feathers and ribands: they fled if they encountered but 200 of the royal troops: when they returned, flying, they were received with laughter and shouts of ridicule. Couplets and epigrams were multiplied and showered upon them and their leaders; the populace were diverted, while the most frightful licence prevailed; blasphemy was added to licentiousness, and the bands of society were loosened, its core poisoned. At length the middling classes, most active at first in the work of sedition and lawlessness, got tired of the wickedness they saw exhibited round them, and of the dangers to which they were perpetually exposed. Blood was spilt, and they scarcely knew for what they fought: each side began to sigh for peace. De Retz failed in gaining the assistance of Turenne, for, corrupted by an emissary of Mazarin, the army of Turenne deserted him. The same arts were used to gain over the partisans of De Retz. The prince de Marsillac was suffering from a severe wound. He had headed a squadron sent out with other troops for the purpose of escorting some convoys of provisions. The party was attacked, and fled on the instant, with the exception of the party led by Marsillac, (who, de Retz observes, had more valour than experience) that kept the ground till the prince had a horse killed under him, and was seriously wounded himself, when he returned to Paris. This circumstance led him, probably, to listen more readily to the representations of Mazarin's emissaries. He became an entire convert to 1649.
the desire for peace, and by degrees, though with diffi- Ætat.
culty, the prince of Conti and the duchess de Longue- 36.
ville were brought to acquiesce in its necessity.

A sort of unsettled tranquillity was thus restored. After a time the court returned to Paris: but the peace was hollow, and the bad passions of men fermented still. The capital, with the exception of not being under arms, was in a state of perpetual and disgraceful tumult. The

war of the Fronde has been named a tragic farce; for it was carried on as much by mutual insults and epigrams as by the sword. Never did mankind display so total a disregard for decency and moral law: churchmen acknowledged their mistresses openly; wives made no secret of favouring their lovers; and infamy became too common to render any one conspicuous. As the nobility of the Fronde were the most dissolute, so, by degrees, did it lose favour with the people. Each noble sought his own interests: each changed side as his hopes changed. The Fronde lost many of its chief partisans. The prince of Condé became reconciled to the prince of Conti; and he, and the duke and duchess de Longueville, and the prince Marsillac, now duke de la Rochefoucauld, through the recent death of his father, fell off from the Fronde, at the same time that they continued to oppose and insult the queen and Mazarin. Meanwhile De Retz was eager to renew a warfare which raised him to the rank of leader. He was still intriguing—still, as it were, covertly in arms,—continuing to exercise unbounded influence over the people of Paris, and to carry on intrigues with the discontented nobles. The court, meanwhile, thoroughly frightened by the late events, was bent on weakening its enemies by any means, however
1650. treacherous and violent. While, therefore, the false
Ætat. security of peace prevented their being on their guard,
37. suddenly one day the prince of Condé, his brother, and brother-in-law, were arrested, and sent to Vincennes; and the queen sent to the duchess de Longueville, requiring her immediate attendance. Rochefoucauld had seen reason to suspect this piece of treachery, and had wished to warn the princes; but the person he intrusted with the commission failed to execute it. When the duke de Vrillière brought the order to the duchess requiring her attendance, Rochefoucauld persuaded her, instead of obeying, to quit Paris on the instant, and hasten to Normandy, to raise her friends in Rouen and Havre de Grace, in favour of her husband and brothers. Rochefoucauld accompanied her; but the duchess having

failed in her attempt, and being pressed by the enemy, was forced to embark, and take refuge in Holland, while Rochefoucauld repaired to his government at Poitou. All was now prepared for war. Turenne, at Stenay, was in revolt. The dukes of Bouillon and la Rochefoucauld collected troops in Guienne. Rochefoucauld was the first in arms, though he had no resource, except his credit and friends, in collecting troops. He made the ceremony of the interment of his father the pretext for assembling the nobility and tenants of his province, and thus raised 2000 horse and 600 foot.* His first attempt was to succour Saumur, besieged by the king's troops. But Mazarin had not been idle: he had engaged what Frederick the Great called his *yellow hussars* in his favour, and, by bribery and corruption, possessed himself of the town. After this Bordeaux became the seat of war, Bouillon and Rochefoucauld having entrenched themselves in that city, and the royal troops attacking it. Ill defended by fortifications, it soon capitulated, but obtained favourable terms. Bouillon and Rochefoucauld were allowed to retire. Mazarin exerted all his powers of persuasion to gain them, but they continued faithful to the princes. Rochefoucauld retreated once again to his government of Poitou, discontented at having received no compensation for his house of Verteuil, which the king's party had razed.

Soon after the divisions in France took somewhat a new face. De Retz gained over the duke of Orleans, and united himself to the party of the princes. The Fronde, thus reinforced, turned all its force against Mazarin. He was forced to fly, and the princes were liberated. It is not here that a detail of the strange events of the war of the Fronde can be given. They are introduced only because Rochefoucauld took a prominent part. Changes were perpetually taking place in the state of parties; and a sort of confusion reigns throughout, arising from the want of any noble or

* Mémoires du duc de Rochefoucauld.

disinterested object in any of the partisans, that at once confuses and wearies the mind. To detail the conduct of a nobility emancipated from all legal as well as all moral and religious restraint,—bent only on the acquisition of power,—influenced by hatred and selfishness,—is no interesting task. It may be instructive; for we see what an aristocracy may become, when it throws off the control of a court, whose interest it is to enforce order,—and of the people, who spontaneously love and admire virtue,—and at once tramples on religion and law. The nobles of the Fronde had lost the dignity and grandeur of feudal power; they aimed at no amelioration for the state of the kingdom; they neither loved freedom nor power in any way permanently advantageous, even to their own order. Turbulent, dissolute, and unprincipled, they acted the parts of emancipated slaves, not of freemen asserting their rights. We seek for some trace of better things in Rochefoucauld's own views and actions, but do not find it. He avows ambition; that and his love for the duchess de Longueville are all the motives that are discernible in his own account of his conduct. When, however, we find madame de Maintenon, who was an excellent and an impartial judge, praise him, in the sequel, as a faithful, true, and prudent friend, we are willing to throw the blame from him on those from whom he divided. Madame de Longueville was certainly guilty of inconstancy; and we are told how entirely she was influenced by the person to whom she attached herself. She drew the prince of Conti after her. Meanwhile, the party in opposition to Mazarin became divided into the new and old Fronde. No one could tell to which De Retz would adhere long. He, for the moment, headed the old, the prince of Condé the new. Rochefoucauld hated De Retz, we are told, with a hatred seldom felt, except by rival men of talent.* He now,

* Cardinal de Retz relates a scene in which he spoke disparagingly of Rochefoucauld. He supposes that this was reported to the duke: "I know not whether this was the case," he says; "but I could never discover any other cause for the first hatred that M. de la Rochefoucauld conceived against me."

therefore, sided with Condé, and endeavoured to alienate him entirely from the coadjutor, and to draw over his brother and sister to the same side. He entered zealously into the plan of breaking off a marriage proposed between the prince of Conti and mademoiselle de Chevreuse, who was known to be the mistress of De Retz, which event widened the separation between the parties. This led to more violent scenes than ever. Condé was forced to retreat, and only appeared strongly guarded; and the queen took advantage of this show of violence to accuse him of high treason to parliament. This occasioned the most tumultuous scenes. The two parties met in the Palace of Justice; both Condé and De Retz surrounded by followers eager to draw their swords on each other,—none more eager than Rochefoucauld, whom De Retz detested, and (if we believe the duke's own account) had several times sought to have assassinated. On this occasion Rochefoucauld was on the alert to revenge himself. Molé, the intrepid and courageous president, alone, by his resolution and firmness, prevented bloodshed. He implored the prince and the coadjutor to withdraw their troops from the palace: they assented. De Retz left the hall to command his followers to retire. Rochefoucauld was sent by Condé on a similar mission to his partisans. This was a more difficult task than they had apprehended: both parties were on the point of coming to blows; and the coadjutor hastened to return to the great chamber, when an extraordinary scene, related by the duke in his memoirs, ensued. He had returned before the coadjutor, and De Retz, pushing the door open, got half in, when Rochefoucauld pressed against it on the other side, and held his enemy's body in the doorway, half in and half out of the chamber. "This opportunity might have tempted the duke de la Rochefoucauld," writes the duke himself. "After all that had passed, both public and private reasons led him to desire to destroy his most mortal enemy; as, besides the facility thus offered of revenging himself, while

he avenged the prince for the shame and disgrace he had endured, he saw also that the life of the coadjutor ought to answer for the disorder he occasioned. But, on the other side, he considered that no combat had been begun; that no one came against him to defend the coadjutor; that he had not the same pretext for attacking him as if blows had already been interchanged—the followers of the prince, also, who were near the duke, did not reflect on the extent of the service they might have rendered their master in this conjuncture;—in fine, the duke would not commit an action that seemed cruel, and the rest were irresolute and unprepared; and thus time was given to liberate the coadjutor from the greatest danger in which he had ever found himself."* Rochefoucauld adds the description of another incident, not less characteristic of the times, that happened subsequently. After this scene in the Palace of Justice, the coadjutor avoided going there or meeting Condé; but, one day, the prince was in his carriage with Rochefoucauld, followed by an immense crowd of people, when they met the coadjutor, in his pontifical robes, leading a procession of relics and images of saints. The prince stopped, out of respect to the church, and the coadjutor went on till he came opposite to the prince, whom he saluted respectfully, giving both him and his companion his benediction. They received it with marks of reverence; while the people around, excited by the *rencontre*, uttered a thousand imprecations against De Retz, and would have torn him to pieces, had not the prince caused his followers to interfere to his rescue. In all this we see nothing of the high bearing of a man of birth, nor the gallantry and generosity of a soldier. That Rochefoucauld did not murder De Retz scarcely redeems him,

* Cardinal de Retz, in describing this scene, declares that Rochefoucauld called out to Coligny and Recousse to kill De Retz, as he held him pinned in the doorway: they refused; while a partizan of the coadjutor came to his aid, and, representing that it was a shame and a horror to commit such an assassination, Rochefoucauld allowed the door to open. Joly relates the occurrence in the same manner; and, although a little softened in expression, the duke's account does not materially differ.

since we find that he entertained the thought, and almost repented not having put it in execution. In the heat of this quarrel the coadjutor had named him coward: ("I lied," De Retz writes in his memoirs, "for he was assuredly very brave;") giving him, at the same time, his nickname, *Franchise*, which he got in ridicule of his assumption of the appearance of frankness as a cloak to double-dealing and real astuteness of disposition. We are willing, however, to suppose that he practised this sort of astuteness only with his enemies, and that he continued frank and true to his friends. He had now become the firm partisan and friend of Condé. This prince, a soldier in heart and profession, grew impatient of the miserable tumults and brawls of Paris, and resolved to assert his authority in arms. He retreated to the south of France, and raised Guienne, Poitou, and Anjou against the court. He was surrounded by the prince of Conti, the duchess de Longueville, Rochefoucauld, Nemours, and many others of his boldest and most powerful adherents. He was received in Bordeaux with joy and acclamations: ten thousand men were levied; and Spain eagerly lent her succour to support him in his rebellion. This was, for France, the most disastrous period of its civil dissensions. All the blessings of civilisation were lost; commerce, the arts, and the sciences were, as it were, obliterated from the face of society; the industrious classes were reduced to misery and want; the peasantry had degenerated into bandits; lawlessness and demoralisation were spread through the whole country. The total disregard for honour and virtue that characterised the higher classes became ferocity and dishonesty in the lower.

Condé, into whose purposes and aims we have small insight,—that he hated Mazarin, and desired power, is all we know,—reaped little advantage from the state to which he assisted, at least, to reduce his country. His friends and partisans quarrelled with each other; supplies fell off; he saw himself on the brink of ruin; and determined to retrieve himself by a total change of

plan. His scheme was to cross the whole of France, and to put himself at the head of the veteran troops of the duke de Nemours. The undertaking was encompassed with dangers. His friends at first dissuaded, but, finding him resolved, they implored permission to accompany him. He made such division as he considered advantageous for his affairs; leaving Marsin behind, with the prince of Conti, to maintain his interests in Guienne, and taking with him Rochefoucauld, his young son, the prince de Marsillac, and several other nobles and officers. Gourville, Rochefoucauld's secretary, who had made several journeys to and fro between Paris and Bourdeaux, and was a man of singular activity, astuteness, and presence of mind, was to serve as their guide.

1652. Ætat. 39. The party set out on Palm Sunday, disguised as simple cavaliers; the servants and followers being sent forward by water. The journey was continued by day and night, almost with the same horses. The adventurers never remained for two hours together in the same place, either for repose or refreshment. Sometimes they stopped at the houses of two or three gentlemen, friends of one of the party, for a short interval of rest, and for the purpose of buying horses: but these gentlemen were far from suspecting that Condé was among them, and spoke so freely, that he heard much concerning himself and his friends which had never before reached his ears. At other times they took shelter in outhouses, or poor public-houses by the way side, while Gourville went to forage in the towns. Their fare was meager enough. In one little inn they found nothing but eggs. Condé insisted on making the omelet himself, piqueing himself on his skill: the hostess showed him how to turn it; but he, using too much force in the manœuvre, threw the supper of himself and his friends into the fire. During the fatigues of this journey Rochefoucauld was attacked by his first fit of the gout; but their greatest embarrassment arose from the young prince de Marsillac, who almost sunk under the fatigues to which he was

exposed. Gourville was the safeguard of the party: he foraged for food, answered impertinent questions, invented subterfuges, and executed a thousand contrivances to ensure their safety, or extricate them from danger. When refreshing their horses in a large village a peasant recognised Condé, and named him. Gourville, hearing this, began to laugh, and told his friends as they came up, and they joining in bantering the poor man, he did not know what to believe. All the party, except the prince at the head of it, whose frame was of iron, were overcome by fatigue. After passing the Loire, they were nearly discovered by the sentinels at La Charité, whom they encountered through a mistake of the guide. The sentinel demanded who went there: Gourville replied that they were officers of the court, who desired to enter. The Condé, pursuing the same tone, bade the man go to the governor, and ask leave for them to be admitted into the town; some soldiers, who were loitering near, were about to take this message, when Gourville exclaimed, addressing the prince, "You have time to sleep here, but our *congé* ends to-morrow, and we must push on;" and he proceeded, followed by the others, who said to the prince, "You can remain if you like;" but Condé, as if discontented, yet not liking to part company, followed, telling them that they were strange people, and sending his compliments to the governor. After passing the river, their dangers were far from over. Some of the companions of the prince were recognised: the report began to spread that he was of the party. They left the high road, and continued their journey to Chatillon in such haste, that they went, according to Rochefoucauld's account, the incredible distance of thirty-five leagues, with the same horses, in one day—a day full of dangerous recognitions and misadventures: they were surrounded by troops; and, one after the other, Condé was obliged to send his companions on various missions to ensure his safety, till he was left at last with only Rochefoucauld, and his son, the prince de Marsillac.

They proceeded guardedly, Marsillac an hundred steps in advance of, and Rochefoucauld at the same distance behind, Condé, so that he might receive notice of any danger, and have some chance of saving himself. They had not proceeded far in this manner before they heard various reports of a pistol, and, at the same moment, perceived four cavaliers on their left, approaching at full trot. Believing themselves discovered, they resolved to charge these four men, determined to die rather than be taken; but, on their drawing near, they found that it was one of their own number, who had returned, accompanied by three gentlemen; and altogether they proceeded to Chatillon. Here Condé heard of the situation of the army he was desirous of joining; but he heard, at the same time, that he was in the close neighbourhood of danger, several of the king's guard being then at Chatillon. They set out again at midnight; and were nearly discovered and lost at the end of their adventure, being recognised by many persons. However, as it turned out, this served instead of injuring them, as several mounted on horseback, and accompanied the party till they fell in with the advanced guard of the army, close to the forest of Orleans. They were hailed by a *qui vive.* The answer, and the knowledge that spread, that Condé had arrived, occasioned general rejoicing and surprise in the army, which greatly needed his presence.

Condé was opposed by Turenne, who now adhered to the court. These two great generals felt that they had a worthy match in each other. Before Condé's presence was generally known, Turenne recognised his influence in an attack that was made; and exclaimed, as he hurried to the spot, "The prince of Condé is arrived!"

Warfare was thus transferred to the immediate neighbourhood of the capital, and intrigues of all kinds varied the more soldierly manœuvres of the contending armies. It is impossible here to detail either the vicissitudes of minor combats, or the artifices of De Retz and the other

leaders. Condé found himself forced at last to give way before Turenne. Finding the position he held at St. Cloud no longer tenable, he resolved to take up a new one at Charenton. For this purpose he was obliged to make nearly the circuit of Paris, then held by the duke of Orleans, who considered himself at the head of the Fronde, but who displayed on this, as on every other occasion, his timid and temporising character. As soon as Condé began his march, Turenne became acquainted with it, and pursued him. Condé advanced as far as the suburbs of Paris, and, for a moment, doubted whether he would not ask permission to pass through the city; but, afraid of being refused, he resolved to march on. Danger approaching nearer and gathering thicker, he determined to make a stand in the fauxbourg St. Antoine. Here, therefore, the battle commenced. The combat was hard contested and fierce: it was attended by various changes in the fortune of the day. At one time Condé had been enabled to advance, but he was again driven back to the gates of St. Antoine, where he was not only assailed in front, but had to sustain a tremendous fire carried on from the surrounding houses. Rochefoucauld was at his side: he, and his son, and other nobles dismounted, and sustained the whole attack, without the assistance of the infantry, who refused to aid them. The duke de Nemours received thirteen wounds, and Rochefoucauld was wounded by an arquebuse, just above the eyes, which, in an instant, deprived him of sight; and he was carried off the field by the duke of Beaufort and the prince of Marsillac. They were pursued; but Condé came to their succour, and gave them time to mount. The citizens were averse to opening the gates of the city to the prince's army, fearing that the troops of Turenne would enter with him: its safety, however, entirely depended on taking refuge in Paris. The duke of Orleans, vacillating and dastardly, heard of the peril of his friends, and of the loss they had sustained, and moved no finger to help them. His daughter, mademoiselle de Montpensier,

showed a spirit superior to them all. She shamed her father into signing an order for the opening of the gates. She repaired to the Bastille, and turned its cannon on the royal army; and then, going herself to the gate St. Antoine, she not only persuaded the citizens to receive the prince and troops, but to sally out, skirmish with, and drive back their pursuers. Rochefoucauld, seeing the diversion made in their favour, desired to take advantage of it; and, though his eyes were starting from his head through the effects of his wound, he rode to the fauxbourg St. Germain, and exhorted the people to come to Condé's aid. Success crowned these efforts; and the prince, after displaying unexampled conduct and valour, entered Paris with flying colours.

This was the crisis of the war of the Fronde. His success and gallantry had raised Condé high in the affections of the Parisians; but popular favour is proverbially short lived, and, in a very short time, he became the object of hatred. De Retz never slept at the work of intrigue. The court, assisted by Turenne, rallied. A popular tumult ensued, more serious than any that had yet occurred; a massacre was the consequence, and the odium fell on Condé and his party. He lost his power even over his own soldiery, and the utmost license prevailed. Several of the leaders of the Fronde died also. The duke of Nemours fell in a duel with his brother-in-law, the duke of Beaufort: the dukes of Chavigni and Bouillon died of a typhus fever then raging in Paris. Scarcity, the consequence of the presence of the soldiery and the state of the surrounding country, became severely felt. Each party longed for repose. The court acted with discretion. Mazarin was sacrificed for the time; and the royal family returned to Paris, Condé having quitted it shortly before. He hastened to Holland, eager, like a true soldier, to place himself at the head of an army; but ill success pursued him: he was declared a rebel; and, from that hour, his star declined. After much treaty, much intrigue, and various acts of treachery, a peace was concluded between

the court and the remnant of the Fronde, and the authority of the king, now declared major, was universally acknowledged.

On the retreat of Condé from Paris, Rochefoucauld retired with his family to Danvilliers, where he spent a year in retirement; recovering from his wounds; and making up his mind to extricate himself from the web of intrigue in which he had immeshed himself. The Fronde was already at an end: it crumbled to pieces under the influence of fear and corruption. Rochefoucauld had already broken with the prince of Conti and the duchess de Longueville*: his last tie was to Condé. He received representations from his friends, and, doubtless, his own mind suggested the advantage of breaking this last link to an overthrown party. One of the bribes held out to him was the marriage of his son with mademoiselle de la Roche-Guyon, his cousin and an heiress. Desirous of acting honourably, he sent Gourville to Brussels, to disengage him 1653. Ætat. 40.

* The couplet, written by Rochefoucauld at the bottom of a portrait of the duchess de Longueville is well known.

> " Pour meriter son cœur, pour plaire à ses beaux yeux,
> J'ai fait la guerre aux rois: je l'aurois faite aux dieux."

When he quarrelled with her, after his wound in the combat of the fauxbourg de St. Antoine, he parodied it.

> " Pour ce cœur inconstant, qu'enfin je connois mieux,
> J'ai fait la guerre aux rois; j'en ai perdu les yeux."

It may here be mentioned, that the prince of Conti and the duchess of Longueville held out in Bourdeaux and Guienne against the royal authority for several years. Through the interposition of Gourville they acceded to terms in 1658. The conclusion of madame de Longueville's life was singular. Cardinal de Rétz and Rochefoucauld both describe her as naturally indolent; but they both so inoculated her with a love of party intrigue, that, when the war of the Fronde ceased, she found it impossible to reconcile herself to a quiet life. She became jansenist. She built herself a dwelling close to the abbey of Port Royal aux Champs. She put herself forward in all the disputes, and was looked up to with reverence by the leaders of the party, and contrived, when every one else had failed, to suspend the disturbances caused by the formula. " A singular woman," the French biographer writes, " who even became renowned while working out her salvation, and saved herself on the same plank from hell and from ennui." Her piety was sincere, for she submitted to great personal privations, and fasted so strictly, that she died, it is said, from inanition. She died about a month after the duke de la Rochefoucauld. The bishop of Autun preached her funeral oration, as madame de Sévigné says, with all the ability, tact, and grace that it was possible to conceive. The children and friends of Rochefoucauld were among his audience, and wept his death anew.

from all ties with Condé. Gourville executed the task with his usual sagacity: he represented to the prince that the duke could no longer be of any service to him; and, having family reasons for wishing to return to France, he asked his consent and permission. The prince admitted his excuses, and freed him from every bond. Gourville then went to Paris, to negotiate the duke's return with cardinal Mazarin. After some difficulty he obtained an interview with the minister, who readily granted leave to the duke to return, and completed his work by gaining over Gourville himself.

Thus ended, as far as any trace remains to us, the active life of a man who hereafter reaped lessons of wisdom from the busy scenes through which he had passed. From various passages in Gourville's memoirs it is evident that he spent the years immediately succeeding to the war on his own estate of la Rochefoucauld. He was nearly ruined by the career he had gone through; and, finding his affairs almost hopelessly deranged, he asked Gourville, who had turned financier, to receive his rents and revenues, and to undertake the management of his estate, household, and debts, allowing him forty pistoles a month for dress and private expenses; which arrangement lasted till his death. Subsequently he lived almost entirely in Paris, where he made a part of what may emphatically be called the best society, of which he was the greatest ornament; and was respected and beloved by a circle of intimate and dear friends. He had always been one of the chief ornaments of the Hotel de Rambouillet. We cannot tell how far he deigned to adopt the jargon of the fair *Precieuses;* but, as the society assembled there was celebrated as the most intellectual and the most virtuous in Paris, it was an honour for a man to belong to it.

It is singular also to remark, that the most unaffected writers of the time of Louis XIV. had once figured as *Alcovistes* or *Precieuses.* Madame de la Fayette, who, in her works, adopted a simplicity of sentiment and expression that contrasts forcibly with the

bombast of the school of Scuderi; madame de Sévigné, whose style is the most delightful and easy in the world; Rochefoucauld, who, first among moderns, concentrated his ideas, and, abjuring the diffuseness that still reigned in literature, aimed at expressing his thoughts in as few words as possible, had all been frequenters and favourites at the Hotel de Rambouillet. It would seem that intellectual indolence is the mind's greatest foe; and, once incited to think, persons of talent can easily afterwards renounce a bad school. Platonic gallantries, metaphorical conceits, and ridiculous phraseology, were not the only accomplishments prized by the *Precieuses*. Learning and wit flourished among them; and when Molière, with happy ridicule, had dissolved the charm that had steeped them in folly, these remained, and shone forth brightly in the persons already named, and others scarcely less celebrated — Ménage, Balzac, Voiture, Bourdaloue, &c.

To return to Rochefoucauld himself. His best and dearest friend was madame de la Fayette, the authoress of "La Princesse de Clêves," and other works that mark her excellent taste and distinguished talents. Madame de la Fayette was, in her youth, a pupil of Ménage and Rapin. She learned Latin under their tuition, and rose above her masters in the quickness of her comprehension. In general society she carefully concealed her acquirements. "She understood Latin," Segrais writes, "but she never allowed her knowledge to appear; so not to excite the jealousy of other women." She was intimately allied to all the clever men of the time, and respected and loved by them. She was a woman of a strong mind; witty and discerning, frank, kindhearted, and true. Rochefoucauld owed much to her, while she had obligations to him. Their friendship was of mutual benefit. "He gave me intellect," she said, "and I reformed his heart."

This heart might well need reform and cure from all of evil it had communicated with during long years of intrigue and adventure. The easiness of his temper, his turn for gallantry, the mobile nature of his mind,

rendered him susceptible to the contamination of the bad passions then so active around him. Ardent, ambitious, subtle,—we find him, in the time of the Fronde, busiest among the intriguers; eager in pursuit of his objects, yet readily turned aside; violent in his hatred, passionate in his attachments, yet easily detached from both, after the first fire had burnt out. His vaccillation of conduct and feeling at that time caused it to be said, that he always made a quarrel in the morning, and the employment of his day was to make it up by evening. Cardinal de Retz, his great enemy, accuses him of thinking too ill of human nature.* Thrown among the fools, knaves, and demoralised women of the Fronde, we cannot wonder that he, seeing the extent of

* "Il y a toujours eût du je ne sais quoi en tout M. de la Rochefoucauld. Il a voulu se mêler d'intrigues dès son enfance, et en un temps où il ne sentait pas les petits intérèts, qui n'ont jamais été son faible, et où il ne connoissait pas les grands, qui, d'un autre sens, n'ont pas été son fort. Il n'a jamais été capable d'aucune affaire, et je ne sais pourquoi; car il avait des qualités qui eussent suplié, en tout autre celles qu'il n'avait pas. Sa vue n'était pas assez étendue, et il ne voyait pas même tout ensemble ce qui etait à sa portée; mais son bon sens, très bon dans la speculation, joint à sa douceur, à son insinuation, et à sa facilité de mœurs, qui est admirable, devait recompenser plus qu'il n'a fait le défaut de sa pénétration. Il à toujours eût une irrésolution habituelle; mais je ne sais même à quoi attribuer cette irrésolution: elle n'a pu venir en lui de la fécondité de son imagination, qui est rien moins que vive. Je ne puis la donner à la stérilité de son jugement, car quoiqu'il ne l'ait pas exquis dans l'action, il à un bon fonds de raison. Nous voyons l'effects de cette, irrésolution, quoique nous n'en connaissons pas la cause. Il n'a jamais été guerier, quoiqu'il fut tres soldat. Il n'a jamais été par luimème bon courtisan, quoiqu'il ait eût toujours bonne intention de l'être. Il n'a jamais été bon homme de parti, quoique toute sa vie il y ait été engagé. Cet air de honte et de timidité que vous lui voyez dans la vie civile s'était tourné dans les affaires en air d'apologie. Il croyait toujours en avoir besoin, ce qui jointes a ses maximes, qui ne marquent pas assez de foi à la vertu, et à sa pratique, qui à toujours été à sortir des affaires avec autant d'impatience qu'il y est entré, me fait conclure qu'il eut beaucoup mieux fait de se connaitre et de se réduire à passer, comme il eût pu, pour le courtisan le plus poli et pour le plus honnète homme, à l'égard de la vie commune, qui eût paru dans le siècle."

Such is the character de Retz gives of his rival. Madame de Sévigné has preserved a portrait of the cardinal by Rochefoucauld. He gives him high praise for good understanding and an admirable memory. He represents him as high minded, and yet more vain than ambitious; an easy temper, ready to listen to the complaints of his followers; indolent to excess, when allowed to repose, but equal to any exertion when called into action; and aided on all occasions by a presence of mind which enabled him to turn every chance so much to his advantage that it seemed as if each had been foreseen and desired by him. He relates that he was fond of narrating his past adventures; and his reputation was founded chiefly on his ability in placing his very defects in a good light. He even regards his last retreat as resulting from vanity, while his friend, madame de Sévigné, more justly looks upon it as resulting from the grandeur of his mind and love of justice.

the evil of which human nature is capable, was unaware that these very passions, regulated by moral principle and religion, would animate men to virtue as well as to vice. He read this lesson subsequently in his own heart, when, turning from the libertine society with which he spent his youth, he became the friend of madame de la Fayette, madame de Sévigné, and the most distinguished persons of the reign of Louis XIV. Yet the taint could not quite be effaced. It left his heart, but it blotted his understanding. He could feel generous, noble, and pious sentiments; but having once experienced emotions the reverse of these, and having found them deep-rooted in others, he fancied that both virtue and vice, good and evil, sprang from the same causes, and were based on the same foundations. Added to this, we may observe that his best friends belonged to a court. True and just as was madame de la Fayette,—amiable and disinterested as madame de Sévigné,—brave as Turenne,—noble as Condé,—pious as Racine,—honest as Boileau,—devout and moral as madame de Maintenon might be, and were, the taint of a court was spread over all; the desire of being well with the sovereign, and making a monarch's favour the cynosure of hearts and the measure of merit. Rochefoucauld fancied that he could discern selfishness in all; yet, had he turned his eye inward with a clearer view, he had surely found that the impulses that caused his own heart to warm with friendship and virtue, were based on a power of forgetting self in extraneous objects; for he was a faithful, affectionate, and disinterested friend, a fond father, and an honourable man. He was brave also; though madame de Maintenon tells us that he was accustomed to say that he looked on personal bravery as folly. This speech lets us into much of the secret recesses of his mind. His philosophy was epicurean; and, wanting the stoic exaltation of sentiment, and worship of good for good's sake, he mistook the principles of the human mind, and saw no excellence in a forgetfulness of self,

the capacity for which he was thus led to deny.* Madame de Maintenon adds, in her portrait, "M. de Rochefoucauld had an agreeable countenance, a dignified manner, much intellect, and little knowledge. He was intriguing, supple, foreseeing. I never knew a friend more constant, more frank, nor more prudent in his advice. He loved to reign: he was very brave. He preserved the vivacity of his mind till his death; and was always lively and agreeable, though naturally serious."

The latter part of his life was embittered by the gout, which seldom left him free from pain. The society of madame de la Fayette and other friends were his resource during the intervals of his attacks, and his comfort throughout. Madame de Sévigné makes frequent mention of him in her letters, and always in a way that marks approbation and respect. She often speaks of his fortitude in suffering bodily pain, and his sensibility when domestic misfortunes visited him severely. His courage never abandoned him, except when death deprived him of those he loved. One of his sons was killed and another wounded in the passage of the Rhine. "I have seen," writes madame de Sévigné, "his heart laid bare by this cruel disaster. He is the first among all the men I ever knew for courage, goodness, tenderness, and sense. I count his wit and agreeable qualities as nothing in comparison." It is from her letters that we gather an account of his death. Mention is made of him, as well and enjoying society, in the

* We doubt the exact truth of these assertions even while we write them. It is true that Rochefoucauld detects self-love as mingling in many of our actions and feelings, but he does not advance the opinion that no disinterested virtue can exist, and, still less, the Helvetian metaphysical notion that self-love is the spring of every emotion, which it is, inasmuch as it is *we* that feel, and that our emotions cause our pulses to beat, not another's; but is not, inasmuch as we do not consult our own interest or pleasure in all we feel and do. Madame de Sévigné relates an anecdote of an officer, who had his arm carried off by the same cannon-ball that killed Turenne, but who, careless of the mutilation, threw himself weeping on the corpse of the hero. She adds that Rochefoucauld shed tears when he heard this told. Such tears are a tribute paid to disinterested virtue; and prove, though the author of the "Maxims" could trace dross in ore wherever it existed, yet that he believed that virtue could be found in entire purity.

month of February. On the 13th of March she writes, 1680.
"M. de la Rochefoucauld has been and is seriously ill. Ætat.
He is better to-day; but there is every appearance of 67.
death: he has a high fever, an oppression, a suppressed gout. There has been question of the English doctor and other physicians: he has chosen his godfather; and frêre Ange will kill him, if God has thus disposed. M. de Marsillac is expected: madame de la Fayette is deeply afflicted." On the 15th of the same month she writes, "I fear that this time we shall lose M. de la Rochefoucauld: his fever continues. He received the communion yesterday. He is in a state worthy of admiration. He is excellently disposed with regard to his conscience,—that is clear: for the rest, it is to him as if his neighbour were ill: he is neither moved nor troubled. He hears the cause of the physicians pleaded before him with an unembarrassed head, and almost without deigning to give his opinion. It reminded me of the verse,

> Trop dessous de lui, pour y prêter l'esprit.

He did not see madame de la Fayette yesterday, because she wept, and he was to take the sacrament: he sent at noon to inquire after her. Believe me that he has not made reflections all his life to no purpose. He has in this manner approached so near to the last moments that their actual presence has nothing new nor strange for him. M. de Marsillac arrived at midnight, the day before yesterday, overwhelmed with grief. He was long before he could command his countenance and manner. He entered at last, and found his father in his chair, little different from his usual appearance. As M. de Marsillac is his friend among his children, there must have been some internal emotion; but he manifested none, and forgot to speak to him of his illness. I am continually with madame de la Fayette, who could never have experienced the delights of friendship and affection were she less afflicted than she is." On the 17th of March the scene closed; and madame de Sevigné writes,

"M. de la Rochefoucauld died this night. My head is so full of this misfortune, and of the extreme affliction of my poor friend, that I must write about it. On Saturday, yesterday, the remedies had done wonders; victory was proclaimed; his fever had diminished. In this state, yesterday, at six o'clock, he turned to death: fever recurred; and, in a word, gout treacherously strangled him: and, although he was still strong, and had not been weakened by losing blood, five or six hours sufficed to carry him off. At midnight he expired in the arms of M. de Condom (Bossuet). M. de Marsillac never quitted him for a moment: he is plunged in inexpressible affliction. Yet he will return to his former life; find the king and the court as they were; and his family will still be around him. But where will madame de la Fayette find such a friend, such society; a similar kindness, resource, and reliance, or equal consideration for herself and her son? She is infirm; she is always at home, and cannot run about town. M. de la Rochefoucauld was sedentary. This state rendered them necessary to each other; and nothing could equal their mutual confidence, and the charm of their friendship." This grief, this friendship, is the most honourable monument a man can receive: who would not desire thus to be sepultured in the heart of one loved and valued? One might regret the pain felt; but, as madame de la Sévigné so beautifully observes, this pain is the proof of the truth and warmth of the affection that united them, and the pleasure they mutually imparted and received. In successive letters there are traces of the inconsolable affliction of madame de la Fayette. "She has fallen from the clouds: every moment she perceives the loss she has suffered;" and again, "Poor madame de la Fayette knows not what to do with herself. The loss of M. de la Rochefoucauld makes so terrible a void in her life that she feels more sensibly the value of so delightful an intimacy. Every one will be consoled at last, except her." A sadder testimonial of her affection is contained in a short passage, saying, "I saw madame de la Fayette. I found her in tears:

a writing of M. de la Rochefoucauld had fallen into her hands which surprised and afflicted her." We are not told the subject of this paper, nor the cause of her affliction: was it some trace of past unkindness or secret injustice? These are the stings, this the poison, of death. There is no recal for a hasty word; no excuse, no pardon, no forgetfulness, for injustice or neglect; — the grave that has closed over the living form, and blocked up the future, causes the past to be indelible; and, as human weakness for ever errs, here it finds the punishment of its errors. While we love, let us ever remember that the loved one may die,— that we ourselves may die. Let all be true and open, let all be faithful and single-hearted, or the poison-harvest reaped after death may infect with pain and agony one's life of memory. We may say, in defence of Rochefoucauld, that Gourville, in his memoirs, alludes to a circumstance that annoyed him with regard to madame de la Fayette: he says that, taking advantage of Gourville's attachment to his former master, she and M. de Langlade plotted together to do him an ill turn, which would have turned greatly to the lady's advantage; and that, at the time of the duke's death, it was said that he was much hurt at having discovered this little intrigue. At the same time madame de la Fayette may have been innocent of the charge. Gourville disliked her, and might accuse her unjustly, and have deceived Rochefoucauld by representations which were false, though he believed in them himself.

We have entered thus fully into all the details known of Rochefoucauld's life, that we might understand better on what principles and feelings the "Maxims" were founded. We find a warm heart, an impetuous temper, joined to great ductility, some insincerity, and no imagination; —we find a penetrating understanding, joined to extreme subtlety, that might well overshoot itself in its aim; — strong attachments, which took the colour greatly of their object. Disease tamed his passions; but his mind was still free to observe, and to form opinions.

The result was an Epicurean philosophy, which answered the *cui bono* by a perpetual reference to self—to pleasure and to pain; while he passed over the first principle of morals, which is, that it is not the pleasure we receive from good actions which actuates us, but love of good. This passion produces pleasure or pain in its result; but the latter is the effect forgotten till it arrives; the former the cause, the impelling motive, the true source, from which our virtues spring. Were we to praise a knife for being sharp, and a stander-by should say, "It deserves no praise. No wonder that it is sharp: it is made of the finest tempered steel, and infinite labour has been bestowed on the manufacture of it:" should we not reply, "Therefore we praise it: because the material is good, and has been rendered better by care, we consider it excellent." The passions and the affections, by their influence over the soul, produce pleasure or pain; but shall we not love and approve those who take pleasure in cultivating virtuous affections, and rejecting vicious ones? Thus considered, it may be said that the question is reduced to a mere war of words; but in practice it is not so. No person could habitually entertain the idea that he was selfish in all he did without weakening his love of good, and, at last, persuading himself to make self-interest, in a confined and evil sense, the aim of his actions; while if, on the contrary, we recognise and appreciate that faculty of the soul, that permits us to forget self in the object of our desire, we shall be more eagerly bent to entertain piety, virtue, and honour, as objects to be attained; satisfied that thus we render ourselves better beings, though, probably, not happier than those of meaner aspirations.

We turn to Rochefoucauld's maxims, and find ample field for explanation of our view in the observations that they suggest. We cannot turn to them without discussing inwardly their truth and falsehood. Some are true as truth: such as—

"There is in the human heart a perpetual generation of passions; so that the destruction of one is almost always the birth of another."

"We promise according to our hopes; we perform according to our fears."

"No one is either so happy or so unhappy as he imagines."

"Fortune turns every thing to the advantage of those whom she favours."

"There is but one true love; but there are a thousand copies."

"It is more shameful to distrust our friends than to be deceived by them."

"A fool has not stuff enough in him to be virtuous."

"Our minds are more indolent than our bodies."

"Jealousy is always born with love, but does not always die with it."

"It would seem that nature has concealed talents and capacities in the depths of our minds of which we have no knowledge: the passions alone can bring these into day, and give us more certain and perfect views than art can afford."

"We arrive quite new at the different ages of life; and often want experience in spite of the number of years we have lived."

"It is being truly virtuous to be willing to be always exposed to the view of the virtuous."

Some maxims are too subtle; and among such is to be ranked the celebrated one, "That we often find something in the misfortunes of our best friends that is not displeasing to us." Taking this in its most obvious sense it merely means, that no evil is so great but that some good accompanies it. Our own personal misfortunes even bring, at times, some sort of compensation, without which they would be intolerable. Regarded more narrowly, it appears that Rochefoucauld meant that we are ready to look upon the sorrows of our friends as something advantageous to ourselves. This, in a precise sense, is totally false, where there is question of real affection and true friendship. There is an emotion, however, of a singular description that does often arise in the heart on hearing bad news. The simple-minded Lavater, in his

journal, was aware of this. He mentions that, on hearing that a friend had fallen into affliction, he felt an involuntary emotion of pleasure. Examination explains to us the real nature of this feeling. The human mind is adverse (we talk of the generality of instances, not of exceptions,) to repose: any thing that gives it hope of exercise, and puts it in motion, is pleasurable. The consciousness of existence is a pleasure; and any novelty of sensation that is not personally painful brings this. When Lavater heard that his friend was in affliction he was roused from the monotony of his daily life. Novelty had charms: he had to tell his wife to set out on a journey for the purpose of seeing and consoling his friend. All this made him conscious of existence, gave him the hope of being useful, caused his blood to flow more freely, and thus even imparted physical pleasure; and, indeed, I should be apt to reduce the essence of this emotion to mere physical sensation, occasioned by an accelerated pulsation, the result of excitement. It may be, and it is, right to record this sensation in any history of the human mind; but it ought to be appreciated at its true value as the mere operation of the lower part of our nature for the most part, and, added to that, pleasure in the expectation of being of use.

This sort of anatomy of mind, when we detect evil in the involuntary impulses of the soul, resembles the scruples felt by an over-pious person, who regards the satisfying hunger and receiving pleasure in eating a dry crust as sin. Dissecting things thus, it becomes difficult to say what is a misfortune. It is a misfortune to lose one's child; so natural and instinctive is the sorrow that ensues that, perhaps, no other can be purer. If a friend lose a child, if we loved that child also, the misfortune becomes our own, and our sympathy may be perfect. If the child promised ill, the pain we feel from our friend's grief may be mitigated by the sense that it is ill-founded, and even that we may derive benefit from the loss lamented: not being blinded by parental passion, we may rejoice in the alleviations foresight and

reason present to us. To call this selfishness is to quarrel with the structure of human nature, which is based on personal identity and consciousness. Passion enables us to throw off even these, sometimes, and totally to amalgamate our interests with those of another. But this is, indeed, of rare occurrence.

We may remark, also, that even in those instances in which the mind does recognise benefit to arise from the misfortune of a friend, and feel involuntary self-gratulation, we regard this as a crime or a vice, and reject it as such, showing the power of disinterestedness over selfishness by dismissing and abhorring the feeling.

The Fronde was the soil in which the "Maxims" had root: better times softened their harshness, and inspired better and higher thoughts. But the younger life of Rochefoucauld was spent in a society demoralised to a degree unknown before—when self-interest was acknowledged as the principle of all; and the affections alone kept a "few green spots"—rare oases of beauty and virtue—amidst the blighted and barren waste of ambition and vice. Usually public revulsions give birth to heroism as well as crime; and war and massacre are elevated and redeemed by courage and self-devotion. But, in the time of the Fronde, there were no very great crimes, and no exalted actions: vice and folly, restless desire of power, and an eager, yet aimless, party spirit, animated society. Hence the mean opinion Rochefoucauld formed of human nature; and the very subtlety and penetration of his intellect occasioned him to err yet more widely in his conclusions. To adopt a maxim of his own, he erred, not by not reaching the mark, but going beyond it. Not that he went so far as his followers. Dry Scotch metaphysicians, men without souls, reduced to a system what he announced merely as of frequent occurrence. They tell us that self-interest is the mover of all our actions: Rochefoucauld only says "self-interest puts to use every sort of virtue and vice." But he does not say that every sort of virtue, or even vice, in all persons is impregnated with self-interest,

though with many it is; and there are a multitude of his remarks which display a thorough appreciation of excellence. The maxims themselves are admirably expressed; the language is pure and elegant; the thoughts clearly conceived, and forcibly worded.

Besides the maxims, Rochefoucauld wrote memoirs of various periods of the regency of Anne of Austria and the wars of the Fronde. Bayle bestows great encomium on this work: "I am sure," he says, "there are few partisans of antiquity who will not set a higher value on the duke de la Rochefoucauld's memoirs than on Cæsar's commentaries." * To which remark the only reply must be, that Bayle was better able to dissect motives, appreciate actions, and reason on truth and falsehood, than to discover the merit of a literary work. "Rochefoucauld's memoirs are still read:" such is Voltaire's notice, while he bestows great praise on the maxims. The chief fault of the memoirs is the subject of them,—the wars of the Fronde,—a period of history distinguished by no men of exalted excellence; neither adorned by admirable actions nor conducing to any amelioration in the state of society: it was a war of knaves (not fools) for their own advancement, ending in their deserved defeat.

* Bayle's Dictionary, article Cæsar.

MOLIÈRE.

1622 — 1673.

Louis XIV. one day asked Boileau "Which writer of his reign he considered the most distinguished;" Boileau answered, unhesitatingly, "Molière." "You surprise me," said the king; "but of course you know best." Boileau displayed his discernment in this reply. The more we learn of Molière's career, and inquire into the peculiarities of his character, the more we are struck by the greatness of his genius and the admirable nature of the man. Of all French writers he is the least merely French. His dramas belong to all countries and ages; and, as if as a corollary to this observation, we find, also, an earnestness of feeling, and a deep tone of passion in his character, that raises him above our ordinary notions of Gallic frivolity.

Molière was of respectable parentage. For several generations his family had been traders in Paris, and were so well esteemed, that various members had held the places of *juge* and *consul* in the city of Paris; situations of sufficient importance, on some occasions, to cause those who filled them to be raised to the rank of nobles. His father, Jean Poquelin, was appointed tapestry or carpet-furnisher to the king: his mother, Marie Cressé*, belonged to a family similarly situated;

* A thousand mistakes were current, even in Molière's own day, with regard to various particulars of his history, which he took no pains to contradict, and which have been copied and recopied by succeeding biographers. Even the calumny that he had incurred the hazard of marrying his own daughter, which he disdained to confute in print, aware that facts known to every one acquainted with him bore the refutation with them, was faintly denied. These days, however, have brought forth a commentator, unwearied in the search for documents on the subject. M. L. F. Beffara hunted through parish registers and other public records, and, by means of these simple but irrefutable instruments, has thrown light on all the darker passages of Molière's history, exonerated him from every accusation, and set his character in a higher point of view than ever.

her father, also, was a manufacturer of carpets and tapestry. Jean Baptiste Poquelin (such was Molière's real name) was born on the 15th January, 1622, in a house in Rue Saint Honorè, near the Rue de la Tonnellerie. He was the eldest of a numerous family of children, and destined to succeed his father in trade. The latter being afterwards appointed *valet de chambre* to the king, and the survivorship of the place being obtained for his son, his prospects in life were sufficiently prosperous. His mother died when he was only ten years of age, and thus a family of orphans were left on his father's hands.

Brought up to trade, Poquelin's education during childhood was restricted to reading and writing; and his boyish days were passed in the warehouse of his father. His heart, however, was set on other things. His paternal grandfather was very fond of play-going, and often took his grandson to the theatre of the Hôtel de Bourgogne, where Corneille's plays were being acted. From this old man the youth probably inherited his taste for the drama, and he owed it to him that his genius took so early the right bent. To him he was indebted for another great obligation. The boy's father reproached the grandfather for taking him so often to the play. "Do you wish to make an actor of him?" he exclaimed. "Yes, if it pleased God that he became as good a one as Bellerose*," the other replied. The prejudices of the age were violent against actors. We almost all take our peculiar prejudices from our parents, whom, in our nonage (unless, through unfortunate circumstances, they lose our respect), we naturally regard as the sources of truth. To this speech, to the admiration which the elder Poquelin felt for actors and acting, no doubt the boy owed his early and lasting emancipation from those puerile or worse prejudices

* Bellerose (whose real name was Pierre Le Meslier) was the best tragic actor of the reign of Louis XIII.: he was the original *Cinna* of Corneille's play. He was elegant in manner, and his elocution was easy. Scarron accuses him of affectation: and we are told, in the Memoirs of the Cardinal de Retz, that a lady objected to M. de la Rochefoucault, that he resembled Bellerose in the affectation of gentleness.

against the theatre, which proved quicksands to swallow up the genius of Racine.

The youth grew discontented as he grew older. The drama enlightened him as to the necessity of acquiring knowledge, and to the beauty of intellectual refinement: he became melancholy, and, questioned by his father, admitted his distaste for trade, and his earnest desire to receive a liberal education. Poquelin thought that his son's ruin must inevitably ensue: the grandfather was again the boy's ally; he gained his point, and was sent as an out-student to the college of Clermont, afterwards of Louis-le-Grand, which was under the direction of the jesuits, and one of the best in Paris. Amand de Bourbon, prince of Conti, brother of the grand Condé, was going through the classes at the same time. After passing through the ordinary routine at this school, the young Poquelin enjoyed a greater advantage than that of being a school-fellow of a prince of the blood. L'Huilier, a man of large fortune, had a natural son, named Chapelle, whom he brought up with great care. Earnest for his welfare and good education, he engaged the celebrated Gassendi to be his private tutor, and placed another boy of promise, named Bernier, whose parents were poor, to study with him. There is something more helpful, more truly friendly and liberal, often in French men of letters than in ours; and it is one of the best traits in our neighbours' character. Gassendi perceived Poquelin's superior talents, and associated him in the lessons he gave to Chapelle and Bernier. He taught them the philosophy of Epicurus; he enlightened their minds by lessons of morals; and Molière derived from him those just and honourable principles from which he never deviated in after life.

1637. Ætat. 14.

Another pupil almost, as it were, forced himself into this little circle of students. Cyrano de Bergerac was a youth of great talents, but of a wild and turbulent disposition, and had been dismissed from the college of Beauvais for putting the master into a farce. He was a

Gascon — lively, insinuating, and ambitious. Gassendi could not resist his efforts to get admitted as his pupil; and his quickness and excellent memory rendered him an apt scholar. Chapelle himself, the friend afterwards of Boileau and of all the literati of Paris, a writer of songs, full of grace, sprightliness, and ease, displayed talent, but at the same time gave tokens of that heedless, gay, and unstable character that followed him through life, and occasioned his father, instead of making him his heir as he intended, to leave him merely a slight annuity, over which he had no control. Bernier became afterwards a great eastern traveller.

1641. Immediately on leaving college Poquelin entered on
Ætat. his service of royal *valet de chambre.* Louis XIII.
19. made a journey to Narbonne; and he attended instead of his father.* This journey is only remarkable from the public events that were then taking place. Louis XIII. and cardinal de Richelieu had marched into Rousillon to complete the conquest of that province from the house of Austria — both monarch and minister were dying. The latter discovered the conspiracy of Cinq-Mars, the unfortunate favourite of the king, and had seised on him and his innocent friend De Thou — they were condemned to death; and conveyed from Tarrascon to Lyons in a boat, which was towed by the cardinal's barge in advance. Terror at the name of the cardinal, contempt for the king, and anxiety to watch the wasting illnesses of both, occupied the court: the passions of men were excited to their height; and the young and ardent youth, fresh from the schools of philosophy, witnessed a living drama, more highly wrought than any that a mimic stage could represent.

* Biographers are apt to invent, if they cannot discover the causes of even trifling events. That the son replaced the father on this occasion, made the elder biographers state that the latter was prevented by his advanced age. Beffara has discovered that the grandfather of Molière married 11th July, 1594, consequently that the father could not be more than forty-six years of age in 1641. A thousand reasons may be found for the substitution of the son. The aversion that Parisians have for travelling might suffice — the large motherless family that the elder Poquelin must leave behind, or a wish to introduce his son to the notice of the king, &c.

The cardinal had a magnificent spirit; he revived the arts, or rather nursed their birth in France. It has been mentioned in the life of Corneille, that he patronised the theatre; and even wrote pieces for it. The tragedy of the "Cid," while it electrified France, by what might be deemed a revelation of genius, gave dignity as well as a new impulse to the drama. Acting became a fashion, a rage; private theatricals were the general amusement, and knots of young men formed themselves into companies of actors. Poquelin, having 1643.
renounced his father's trade, and having received a Ætat.
liberal education, entered, it is believed, on the study of 21.
the law; having been sent to Orleans for that purpose. He returned to Paris, to commence his career of advocate; here he was led to associate with a few friends of the same rank, in getting up plays: by degrees he 1645.
became wedded to the theatre; and when the private Ætat.
company resolved to become a public one, and to 23.
derive profit from their representations, he continued belong to it; and, according to the fashion of actors in those days assumed a new name—that of Molière. His father was displeased, and took every means to dissuade him from his new course; but the enthusiasm of Molière overcame all opposition. There is a story told, that one respectable friend, who was sent by his father to argue against the theatre, was seduced by the youth's arguments to adopt a taste for it, and led to turn comedian himself. His relations did not the less continue their opposition; they exiled him as it were from among them; and erased the most illustrious name in France for their genealogical tree. What would their tree be worth now did it not bear the name of Molière as its chief bloom, which more rare than the flower of the aloe, which blossoms once in a hundred years, has never had its match.

There were many admirable actors in Molière's time, chiefly however in comedy. There were the three, known in farce under the names of Gauthier Garguille, Turlupin, and Gros Guillaume, who in the end died tragically,

through the effects of fear. Arlechino (Harlequin) and Scaramouche, both Italians, were however the favourites: the latter is said to have been Molière's master in the art of acting; and he never missed a representation at the Italian theatre when he could help it. The native comedy of the Italians gave him a taste for the true humour of comic situation and dialogue; and we owe to his well-founded predilection what we and the German cities (in contradistinction to the French, who judge always by rule and measure, and not by the amusement they receive, nor the genius displayed) prefer to his five act pieces. Nor was this the only source whence he derived instruction. The bustle and intrigue of the Spanish comedies had been introduced by Corneille in his translation of Lope de Vega's "Verdad Sospechosa." Corneille, however, made the character of the *Liar*, who is the hero, more prominent. Molière is said to have declared, that he owed his initiation into the true spirit of comedy from this play. He took the better part; rejecting the intrigue, disguises, and trap-doors, and discerning the great effect to be produced by a character happily and truly conceived, and then thrown into apposite situations.

There is much obscurity thrown over the earlier portion of Molière's life. We know the names of some of his company. There was Gros René, and his beautiful wife; there were the two Bejarts, brothers, whose excellent characters attached Molière to them, and Madeleine Bejart, their sister, a beautiful girl, the mistress of a gentleman of Modena—to whom Molière was also attached. Molière himself succeeded in the more farcical comic characters.

The disorders of the capital during the regency at the beginning of Louis XIV.'s reign, and the war of the Fronde, replunged France in barbarism; and torn by faction, the citizens of Paris had no leisure for the
1646. theatre. Molière and his troop quitted the city for the
Ætat. provinces, and among other places visited Bordeaux,
24. where he was powerfully protected by the duc d'Epernon, governor of Guienne. It is said, that Molière

wrote and brought out a tragedy, called "The Thebaid," in this town, which succeeded so ill, that he gave up the idea of composing tragic dramas, though his chief ambition was to succeed in that higher walk of his art. When we consider the impassioned and reflective disposition of Molière, we are not surprised at his desire to succeed in impersonating the nobler passions; we wonder rather how it was that he should have wholly failed in delineating such, while his greatest power resided in the talent for seizing and portraying the ridiculous.

After a tour in the provinces he returned to Paris. His former schoolfellow, the prince of Conti, renewed his acquaintance with him; and caused him and his company to bring out plays in his palace: and when this prince went to preside at the states of Languedoc, he invited them to visit him there.

Finding Paris still too distracted by civil broils to 1653.
encourage the theatre, Molière and his company left it Ætat.
for Lyons. Here he brought out his first piece, 31.
"L'Etourdi," which met with great and deserved success. We have an English translation, under the name of "Sir Martin Marplot," originally written by the celebrated duke of Newcastle, and adapted for the stage by Dryden; the French play, however, is greatly superior. In that the lover, *Lelie*, is only a giddy coxcomb, full of conceit and gaiety of heart. *Sir Martin* is a heavy plodding fool; and the mistakes we sympathise with, even while we laugh, when originating in mere youthful levity, excite our contempt when occasioned by dull obesity. Thus in the English play, the master appears too stupid to deserve his lady at last — and she is transferred to the servant; a catastrophe which must shock our manners; and we are far more ready to rejoice in the original, when the valet at last presents *Celie*, with her father's consent, to his master, asking him whether he could find a way even then to destroy his hopes.

The "Dépit Amoureux" followed, which is highly

amusing. Although Molière improved afterwards, these first essays are nevertheless worthy his genius.

The company to which he belonged possessed great merit, both in public and private. We cannot expect to find strictness of moral conduct in French comedians, in an age when the manners of the whole country was corrupt, and civil war loosened still more the bonds of society, and produced a state characterised as being "a singular mixture of libertinism and sedition, rife with wars at once sanguinary and frivolous; when the magistrates girded on the sword, and bishops assumed a uniform; when the heroines of the court followed at once the camp and church processions, and factious wits made impromptus on rebellion, and composed madrigals on the field of battle." The war of the Fronde produced a state of license and intrigue: and of course it must be expected that such should be found in a company of strolling actors; to detail the loves of Molière at this time would excite little interest, except inasmuch as it would seem that he brought an affectionate heart and generous spirit, to ennoble what in a less elevated character would have been mere intrigue. Madeleine Bejart was a woman of talent as well as beauty; her brothers were men of good principles and conduct. The sort of liberal, friendly, and frank-hearted spirit that characterised the circle of friends, is well described in the autobiography of a singular specimen of the manners of those times. D'Assouçy was a sort of troubadour; a good musician, and an agreeable poet, who travelled from town to town, lute in hand, and followed by two pages, who took parts in his songs; gaining his bread, and squandering what he gained without forethought. At Lyons, he fell in with Molière, and the brothers Bejart. He continues: "The stage has charms, and I could not easily quit these delightful friends. I remained three months at Lyons, amidst plays and feasts, though I had better not have staid three days, for I met with various disasters in the midst of my amusements (he was stripped of all his money in a

gambling-house.) Having heard that I should find a soprano voice at Avignon, whom I could engage to join me, I embarked on the Rhone with Molière, and arrived at Avignon with forty pistoles in my pocket, the relics of my wreck." He then goes on to state how he was stripped of this sum among gamblers and jews; and adds, "But a man is never poor while he has friends; and having Molière and all the family of Bejart as allies, I found myself, despite fortune and jews, richer and happier than ever; for these generous people were not satisfied by assisting me as friends, they treated me as a relation. When they were invited to the States, I accompanied them to Pezenas, and I cannot tell the kindness I received from all. They say that the fondest brother tires of a brother in a month; but these, more generous than all the brothers in the world, invited me to their table during the whole winter; and, though I was really their guest, I felt myself at home. I never saw so much kindness, frankness, or goodness, as among these people, worthy of being the princes whom they personated on the stage."

At Pezenas, to which place they were invited by the prince of Conti, Molière's company found a warm welcome and generous pay from the prince himself. Molière got up, for the prince's amusement, not only the two regular plays which he had written, but other farcical interludes, which became afterwards the groundwork of his best comedies. Among these were the "Le Docteur Pedant;" "Gorgibus dans le Sac" (the forerunner of "La Fourberies de Scapin"); "Le grand Benet de Fils," who afterwards flourished as "Le Médecin malgré Lui;" "Le grand Benet de fils," who appears to have blossomed hereafter into *Thomas Diafoirus*, in the "Malade Imaginaire." There were also "Le Docteur Amoureux," "Le Maître d'E'cole," and "La Jalousie de Barbouillé." All these farces perished. Boileau, notwithstanding his love for classical correctness, lamented their loss; as he said, there was always something spirited and animating in the slightest of Molière's works.

These theatrical amusements delighted the prince of Conti; and their author became such a favourite, that he offered him the place of his secretary, which Molière declined. We are told that the prince, with all his kindness of intention, was of such a tyrannical temper, that his late secretary had died in consequence of ill treatment, having been knocked down by the prince with the fire-tongs, and killed by the blow. We do not wonder, therefore, at Molière's refusing the glittering bait. And in addition to the independence of his spirit, he loved his art, and no doubt felt the workings of that genius which hereafter gave such splendid tokens of its existence, and which is ever obnoxious to the trammels of servitude.

He continued for some time in Languedoc and Provence, and formed a friendship at Avignon with Mignard, which lasted to the end of their lives, and to which we owe the spirited portrait of Molière, which represents to the life the eager, impassioned, earnest and honest physiognomy of this great man. As Paris became tranquil Molière turned his eyes thitherward, desirous of establishing his company in the metropolis. He went first to Grenoble and then to Rouen, where, after some negotiation and delay, and several journeys to Paris, he obtained the protection of monsieur, the king's brother; was presented by him to the king and queen-mother, and finally obtained permission to establish himself in the capital.

The rival theatre was at the Hôtel de Bourgogne; here Corneille's tragedies were represented by the best tragic actors of the time. The first appearance of Molière's company before Louis XIV. and his mother, Anne of Austria, took place at the Louvre. "Nicomede" was the play selected; success attended the attempt, and the actresses in particular met with great applause. Yet even then Molière felt that his company could not com-

* Molière's company then consisted of, in actors, the two brothers, Bejart, Du Parc, De Brie, De Croisal: in actresses, of the sisters Bejart, Du Parc, De Brie, and Hervé. Du Croisy and La Grange, two first-rate actors, were soon afterwards added.

pete with its rival in tragedy: when the curtain fell, therefore, he stepped forward, and, after thanking the audience for their kind reception, asked the king's leave to represent a little divertisement which had acquired a reputation in the provinces: the king assented; and the performers went on, to act "Le Docteur Amoureux" one those farces, several of which he had brought out in Languedoc, conceived in the Italian taste, full of buffoonery and bustle. The king was amused, and the piece succeeded; and hence arose the fashion of adding a short farce after a long serious play. The success also secured the establishment of his company; they acted at first at the Theâtre du Petit Bourbon, and afterwards, when that theatre was taken down to give place to the new building of the colonnade of the Louvre, the king gave him that of the Palais Royal, and his company assumed the name of Comediens de Monsieur.

Parisian society opened a new field for Molière's talents; subjects for ridicule multiplied around him. The follies which appeared most ludicrous were so nursed and fostered by the high-born and wealthy, that he almost feared to attack them. But they were too tempting. In addition to the amusement to be derived from exhibiting in its true colours an affectation the most laughable, he was urged by the hope of vanquishing by the arms of wit, a system of folly, which had taken deep root even with some of the cleverest men in France; — we allude to the *coterie* of the Hôtel de Rambouillet; and to the farce of the "Précieuses Ridicules," which entered the very sanctum, and caused irremediable disorder and flight to all the darling follies of the clique.

The society of the Hôtel de Rambouillet had a language and conduct all its own; these were embodied in the endless novels of mademoiselle Scuderi. Gallantry and love were the watchwords, and metaphysical disquisitions were the labours of the set. But these were not allowed to subsist in homely phrase or a natural manner. The euphuism of our Elizabethian coxcombs was tame and tropeless in comparison with the high flights of the heroes and heroines of the Hôtel de Ram-

bouillet. All was done by rule; all adapted to a system. The lover had a regular map laid out, and he entered on his amorous journey, knowing exactly the stoppages he must make, and the course he must pass through on his way to the city of Tenderness, towards which he was bound. There was the village of *Billets galans*; the hamlet of *Billets doux*; the castle of *Petits Soins*; and the villa of *Jolis Vers*. After possessing himself of these, he still had to fear being forced to embark on the sea of Dislike, or the lake of Indifference; but if, on the contrary, he pushed off on the river of Inclination, he floated happily down to his bourne. Their language was a jargon, which, as Sir Walter Scott observes, in his "Essay on Molière," resembled a highlander's horse, hard to catch, and not worth catching. They gave enigmatic names to the commonest things, which to call by their proper appellations, was, as Molière terms it, *du dernier bourgeois*. When an "innocent accomplice of a falsehood" was mentioned, a *Précieuse* (they themselves adopted and gloried in this name; Molière only added *ridicules*, to turn the blow a little aside from the centre of the target at which he aimed) could, without a blush, understand that a night-cap was the subject of conversation; water with them was too vulgar unless dignified as celestial humidity; a thief could be mentioned when designated as an inconvenient hero; and a lover won his mistress's applause when he complained of her disdainful smile, as "a sauce of pride."

Purity of feeling however was the soul of the system. Authors and poets were admitted as admirers, but they never got beyond the villa of *Jolis Vers*. When Voiture, who had glorified Julie d'Angennes his life-long, ventured to kiss her hand, he was thrown from the fortifications of the castle of *Petit Soins*, and soused into the lake of Indifference: even her noble admirer, the duke Montauzier, was forced to paddle on the river of Inclination, for fourteen years *, before he was admitted to the city

* For him surely was written Miss Lamb's pretty song —

"High born Helen
Round your dwelling
These twenty years I've paced in vain.

of Tenderness, and allowed to make her his wife. Their style of life was as eccentric as their talk. The lady rose in the morning, dressed herself with elegance, and then went to bed. The French bed, placed in an alcove, had a passage round it, called the *ruelle*; to be at the top of the *ruelle* was the post of honour; and Voiture, under the title of *Alcovist*, long held this envied post, beside the pillow of his adored Julie, while he never was allowed to touch her little finger. The folly had its accompanying good. The respect which the women exacted, and the virtue they preserved, exalted them, and in spite of their high-flown sentiments, and metaphysical conceits, wits did not disdain to "put a soul into the body of" nonsense. Rochefoucault, Menage, madame de Sevigné, madame Des Houilleres, Balzac, Vaugelas, and others, frequented the Hótel de Rambouillet, and lent the aid of their talents to dignify their *galimathias*.

But it was too much for the honest comic poet to bear. He perceived the whole of society infected—nobles and prelates, ladies and poets, marquisses and lacqueys, all wandered about the *Pays de Tendre*, lost in a very labyrinth of inextricable nonsense. They assumed fictitious names*, they promulgated fictitious

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Haughty Beauty,
Your lover's duty
Has been his pleasure and his pain."

Vide *Poet. Works of Charles Lamb.*

Molière in the farce in question gives a diverting account of a *Précieuse* courtship: "Il faut qu'un amant, pour être agréable, sache débiter les beaux sentiments, pousser le doux, le tendre, et le passionné, et que sa recherche soit dans les formes. Premièrement, il doit voir au temple, ou à la promenade, ou dans quelque cérémonie publique, la personne dont il devient amoureux, ou bien être conduit fatalement chez elle par un parent ou un ami, et sortir de là tout rêveur ou mélancholique. Il cache, un temps, sa passion à l'objet aimé, et cependant lui rends plusieurs visites où l'on ne manque jamais de mettre sur le tapis une question galante qui exerce les esprits de l'assemblée. Le jour de la déclaration arrive, qui se doit faire ordinairement dans une allée de quelque jardin, tandis que la compagnie s'est un peu éloignée: et cette déclaration est suivie d'un prompte courroux, qui parait à notre rougeur, et qui, pour un temps, bannit l'amant de notre présence. Ensuite il trouve moyen de nous appaiser, de nous accoutumer insensiblement au discours de sa passion, et de tirer de nous cet aveu qui fait tant de peine. Après cela viennent les avantures, les rivaux qui se jettent à traverse d'une inclination établie, les persécutions des pères, les jalousies conçues sous des fausses apparences, les plaintes, les désespoirs, les enlèvemens, et ce qui s'ensuit."

* When Fléchier delivered a funeral oration on the death of madame de Montauzier, he spoke of her mother by her assumed name of Athénice.

sentiments; they admired each other, according as they best succeeded in being as unnatural as possible. Molière stripped the scene and personages of their gilding in a moment. His fair *Précieuses* were the daughters of a *bourgeois* named Gorgibus, who quitted their homely names of Cathos and Madelon, for Aminte and Polixene, dismissed their admirers for proposing to marry them, scolded their father for not possessing *le bel air des choses*, and are taken in by two valets whom they believe to be nobles, who easily imitate the foppery and sentimentalism, which these young ladies so much admire.*

1659. Ætat. 37. The success of the piece was complete — from that moment the Hôtel de Rambouillet talked sense. Menage says: "I was at the first representation of the "Précieuses Ridicules" of Molière, at the Petit Bourbon, mademoiselle de Rambouillet, madame de Grignan, M. Chapelain, and others, the select society of the Hôtel de Rambouillet, were there. The piece was acted with general applause; and for my own part I was so delighted that I saw at once the effect that it would produce. Leaving the theatre, I took M. Chapelain by the hand, and said We have been used to approve all the follies so well and wittily satirised in this piece; but believe

" You remember, my brothers," he exclaimed, " those cabinets, which we still regard with so much veneration; where the mind was purified and where virtue was revered under the name of the incomparable Athénice; where persons of quality or talent assembled, and composed a select court— numerous without confusion, modest without constraint, learned without pride, refined without affectation." La Bruyère describes this society in somewhat different terms: " Not long ago we witnessed a circle of persons of either sex, drawn together by conversation and the cultivation of talent. They left the art of speaking intelligibly to the vulgar. One remark, enveloped in mysterious phrase, brought on another yet more obscure; and they went on exaggerating till they spoke in absolute enigmas, which were most applauded. By talking of delicacy, sentiment, and finesse of expression, they managed neither to make themselves understood, nor to understand. There was need of neither good sense, memory, nor cleverness for these conversations. Wit was all in all — not true wit, but that which consists in conceits and extravagant fancies."

* It has been frequently asserted this piece was written while the author was in the country; his preface favours this notion, in which he says that he only ridicules *les fausses Précieuses*, that name being then held in esteem. Contemporary notices, however, make it apparent that this piece came out first in Paris; and it was impossible that he could have so well seized the peculiar tone of these sentimental pedants any where except in their very birth-place.

me, as St. Remy said to king Clovis — 'We must burn what we have adored, and adore what we have burnt.' It happened as I predicted, and we gave up this bombastic nonsense from the time of the first representation." A better victory could not have been gained by comic poet: to it may be said to have been added another. While the *Précieuses* yielded to the blow, unsophisticated minds enjoyed the wit: in the midst of the piece, an old man cried out suddenly from the pit, "Courage, Molière, this is true comedy!" The author himself felt that he had been inspired by the spirit of comic drama. That this consisted in a true picture of the follies of society, idealised and grouped by the fancy, but in every part in accordance with nature. He became aware, that he had but to examine the impression made on himself, and to embody the conceptions they suggested to his mind. As he went on writing, he in each new piece made great and manifest improvement. "Sganarelle" was his next effort: it is, perhaps, not in his best taste; it is like a tale of the Italian novelists — that the husband's misfortune had existence in his fancy only is the author's best excuse.

Success ought to have taught Molière to abide by 1661.
comedy, and to become aware that a quick sense of the Ætat.
ridiculous, and a happy art in the scenic representation 39.
of it, was the bent of his genius. But a desire to succeed in a more elevated and tragic style still pursued him. He brought out "Don Garcie de Navarre," a very poor play, unsuccessful in its *début*, and afterwards so despised by the author as not to be comprised in his edition of his works. He quickly dissipated this cloud, however, by bringing out "L'E'coledes Maris," one of his best comedies.

The splendours of the reign of Louis XIV. were now beginning to shine out in all their brilliancy. The first attempt, however, at a fête — superior in magnificence, originality, and beauty to any thing the world had yet seen — was made, not by the king himself. In an evil hour for himself, Fouquet, the minister of finances, got leave to entertain royalty at his villa, or rather palace

of Vaux. Blinded by prosperity, this unfortunate man thought to delight the king by the splendor of his entertainment; he awoke indeed a desire to do the like in Louis's mind, but he gave the final blow to his own fortunes, already undermined. Fouquet had admired mademoiselle de la Vallière; he had expressed his admiration, and sought return with the insolence of command rather than the solicitations of tenderness: he was rejected with disdain. His mortification made him suspect another more successful lover: he discovered the hidden and mutual passion of the king and the beautiful girl; and, with the most unworthy meanness, he threatened her with divulging the secret; and added the insolence of an epigram on her personal appearance. La Vallière informed her royal lover of the discovery which Fouquet had made—and his fall was resolved on.

The minister had lavished wealth, taste, and talent on his fête. Le Brun painted the scenes; Le Nôtre arranged the architectural decorations; La Fontaine wrote verses for the occasion; Molière not only repeated his "E'cole des Maris," but brought out a new species of entertainment: a ballet was prepared, of the most magnificent description; but, as the principal dancers had to vary their characters and dresses in the different scenes, that the stage might not be left empty and the audience get weary with waiting, he composed a light sketch, called "Les Facheux" (our unclassical word *bore* is the only translation), in which a lover, who has an assignation with his mistress, is perpetually interrupted by a series of intruders, who each call his attention to some subject that fills their minds, and is at once indifferent and annoying to him. A novel sort of amusement added therefore charms to luxury and feasting; but the very perfection of the scene awoke angry feelings in Louis's mind: he saw a portrait of La Vallière in the minister's cabinet, and was roused to jealous rage: disdaining to express this feeling, he pretended another cause of displeasure, saying that Fouquet must have been guilty of peculation, to afford so vast an expenditure. He would have caused

him to be arrested on the instant, had not his mother stopped him, by exclaiming, "What, in the midst of an entertainment which he gives you!"

Louis accordingly delayed his revenge. A glittering veil was drawn over the reality. With courtly ease he concealed his resentment by smiles; and, while meditating the ruin of the master and giver of the feast, entered with an apparently unembarrassed mind on the enjoyment of the scene. He was particularly pleased with "Les Facheux;" but, while he was expressing his approbation to Molière, he saw in the crowd *Grand Veneur*, or great huntsman to the king, a Nimrod devoted to the chase; and he said, pointing to him, "You have omitted one bore." On this Molière went to work; he called on M. de Soyecourt, slily engaged him in one of his too ready narrations of a chase; and, on the following evening, the lover had added to his other bores a courtier, who insists on relating the history of a long hunting-match in which he was engaged. English followers of the field find ample scope for ridicule in this scene, which in their eyes contrasts the rules of French sport most ludicrously with their more manly mode of running down the game. Another more praiseworthy effort to please and flatter the king in this piece was the introducing an allusion to Louis's efforts to abolish the practice of duelling.

The success of Molière and his talent naturally led to his favor among the great. The great Condé delighted in his society; and with the delicacy of a noble mind told him, that, as he feared to trespass on his time inopportunely if he sent for him; he begged Molière when at leisure to bestow an hour on him to send him word, and he would gladly receive him. Molière obeyed; and the great Condé at such times dismissed his other visitors to receive the poet, with whom he said he never conversed without learning something new. Unfortunately this example was not followed by all. Many little-minded persons regarded with disdain a man stigmatised with the name of actor, while others

presumed insolently on their rank. The king generously took his part on these occasions. The anecdotes indeed which displays Louis's sympathy for Molière are among the most agreeable that we have of that monarch, and are far more deserving of record than the puerilities which Racine has commemorated. When brutally assaulted by a duke, the king reproved the noble severely. Madame Campan tells a story still more to this monarch's honour. Molière continued to exercise his functions of royal *valet de chambre*, but was the butt of many impertinences on account of his being an actor. Louis heard that the other officers of his chamber refused to eat with him, which caused Molière to abstain from sitting at their table. The king, resolved to put an end to these insults, said one morning, "I am told you have short commons here, Molière, and that the officers of my chamber think you unworthy of sharing their meals. You are probably hungry, I always get up with a good appetite; sit at that table where they have placed my *en cas de nuit*" (refreshment, prepared for the king in case he should be hungry in the night, and called an *en cas.*) The king cut up a fowl; made Molière sit down, gave him a wing, and took one himself, just at the moment when the doors were thrown open, and the most distinguished persons court entered, "You see me," said the king, "employed in giving Molière his breakfast, as my people do not find him good enough company for themselves." From this time Molière did not need to put himself forward, he received invitations on all sides. Not less delicate was the attention paid him by the poet Bellocq. It was one of the functions of Molière's place, to make the king's bed; the other valets drew back, averse to sharing the task with an actor; Bellocq stept forward, saying, "Permit me, M. Molière, to assist you in making the king's bed."

It was however at court only that Molière met these rebuffs; elswhere his genius caused him to be admired and courted, while his excellent character secured him the affection of many friends. He brought

forward Racine; and they continued intimate till Racine offended him by not only transferring a tragedy to the theatre of the Hôtel de Bourgogne, but seducing the best actress of his company to that of the rival stage. With Boileau he continued on friendly terms all his life. His old schoolfellow, "the joyous Chapelle," was his constant associate; though he was too turbulent and careless for the sensitive and orderly habits of the comedian.

Molière indeed was destined never to find a home after his own heart. Madeleine Bejart had a sister * much younger than herself, to whom Molière became passionately attached. She was beautiful, sprightly, clever, an admirable actress, fond of admiration and pleasure. Molière is said to describe her in "Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme," as more piquante than beautiful — fascinating and graceful — witty and elegant; she charmed in her very caprices. Another author speaks of her acting; and remarks on the judgment she displays

* It is well known that even during his life-time the calumny was spread abroad, that Molière married his own natural daughter. The great difference of age between the sisters, Madeleine and Armande Bejart gave to those who were ignorant of their true relationship some foundation for a report, which sprung from a former intimacy between Molière and the elder sister. He always disdained to contradict the falsehood; and it has generally been assumed by biographers, while they acquitted him of the alleged crime, that his wife was the daughter of Madeleine. We owe the discovery of this falsehood to the pains which M. Beffara took to discover the certificate of Molière's marriage; which is as follows: — "Jean Baptiste Poquelin, son of sieur Jean Poquelin, and of the late Marie Cressé, on the one side: and Armande Gresinde Bejart, daughter of the late Joseph Bejart and of Marie Hervée, on the other: both of this parish, opposite the Palais Royal, affianced and married together, by permission of M. Comtes, deacon of Nôtre-Dame, and grand vicar of Monseigneur the cardinal de Retz, archbishop of Paris; in presence of the said Jean Poquelin, father of the bridegroom, and of André Boudet, brother-in-law of the bridegroom; the said Marie Hervée, mother of the bride, and Louis Bejart and Madeleine Bejart, brother and sister of the said bride." This certificate is signed by J. B. Poquelin, J. Poquelin, Boudet, Marie Hervée, Armande Gresinde Bejart, Louis Bejart, and Bejart (Madeleine). Madeleine's daughter, by the noble Modena, who was the cause of this calumny, was older than the wife of Molière; her baptismal register names her the daughter of Madeleine Bejart et Messire Esprit de Raymond, noble of Modena, and chamberlain to Monsieur, brother of the king, born 11th July, 1638; her name was Françoise, and she is mentioned as illegitimate in her baptismal register. It is singular that in his "Essay on Molière," Sir Walter Scott slurs over the complete refutation which this certificate brings with it of the calumny in question, and speaks of the relationship of Molière and his wife as a doubtful point. This is neither just nor generous; but Sir Walter seems to insinuate that as Molière's life was not entirely exempt from the stain of illicit love, a little more or less was of no account.

both in dialogue and by-play: "She never looks about," he says, "nor do her eyes wander to the boxes; she is aware that the theatre is full, but she speaks and acts as if she only saw those with whom she is acting. She is elegant and rich in her attire without affectation: she studies her dress, but forgets it the moment she appears on the stage; and if she ever touches her hair or her ornaments, this bye-play conceals a judicious and inartificial satire, and she thus enters more entirely into ridicule of the women she personates: but with all these advantages, she would not please so much but for her sweet-toned voice. She is aware of this, and changes it according to the character she fills." With these attractions, young and lovely, and an actress, madame (or as she was called according to the fashion of the times, which only accorded the madame to women of rank, mademoiselle) Molière, fancying herself elevated to a high sphere when she married, giddy and coquettish, disappointed the hopes of her husband, whose heart was set on domestic happiness, and the interchange of affectionate sentiments in the privacy of home. Yet the gentleness of his nature made him find a thousand excuses for her: — "I am unhappy," he said, "but I deserve it; I ought to have remembered that my habits are too severe for domestic life: I thought that my wife ought to regulate her manners and practices by my wishes; but I feel that had she done so, she in her situation would be more unhappy than I am. She is gay and witty, and open to the pleasures of admiration. This annoys me in spite of myself. I find fault — I complain. Yet this woman is a hundred times more reasonable than I am, and wishes to enjoy life; she goes her own way, and secure in her innocence, she disdains the precautions I entreat her to observe. I take this neglect for contempt; I wish to be assured of her kindness by the open expression of it, and that a more regular conduct should give me ease of mind. But my wife, always equable and lively, who would be

unsuspected by any other than myself, has no pity for my sorrows; and, occupied by the desire of general admiration, she laughs at my anxieties." His friends tried to remonstrate in vain. "There is but one sort of love," he said, "and those who are more easily satisfied do not know what true love is." The consequence of these dissensions was in the sequel a sort of separation; full of disappointment and regret for Molière, but to which his young wife easily reconciled herself. Her conduct disgraced her; but she had not sufficient feeling either to shrink from public censure or the consciousness of rendering her husband unhappy. To these domestic discomforts were added his task of manager; the difficulty of keeping rival actresses in good humour, the labour of pleasing a capricious public.

The latter task, as well as that of amusing his sovereign, was by far the easiest; as in doing so he followed the natural bent of his genius. He had begun the "Tartuffe." He brought out "L'E'cole des Femmes," one of his gayest and wittiest comedies. It is known in England, through the adaptation of Wycherly; and called "The Country Girl." Unfortunately, in his days, the decorum of the English stage was less strict than the French; and what in Molière's play was fair and light raillery, Wycherly mingled with a plot of a licentious and disagreeable nature. The part, however, of the *Country Girl* herself, personated by Mrs. Jordan, animated by her bewitching *naïveté*, and graced by her frank, joyous, silver-toned voice, was an especial favourite with the public in the days of our fathers In Paris, the critics were not so well pleased; truth of nature they called vulgarity, familiarity of expression was a sin against the language. Molière deigned so far to notice his censurers as to write the "Critique de l'E'cole des Femmes," in which he easily throws additional ridicule on those who attacked him. The "Impromptu de Versailles" was written in the same spirit, at the command of the king. The war of words thus carried on, and replied to, grew more and more bitter:

personal ridicule was exchanged by his enemies for calumny. Monfleuri, the actor, was malicious enough to present a petition to the king, in which he accused Molière of marrying his own daughter. Molière never deigned to reply to his accusation; and the king showed his contempt by, soon after, standing godfather to Molière's eldest child, of whom the duchess of Orleans was godmother.

In those days, as in those of our Elizabeth, the king and courtiers took parts in the ballets.* These *comédie-ballets* were of singular framework; comedies, in three acts, broad almost to farce, were interspersed with dances: to this custom, to the three act pieces that thus came into vogue, we owe some of the best of Molière's plays; when, emancipated from the necessity of verse and five acts, he could give full play to his sense of the ridiculous, and talent for comic situation; and when, unshackled by rhyme, he threw the whole force of his dry comic humour into the dialogue, and by a single word, a single expression, stamp and immortalise a folly, holding it up for ever to the ridicule it deserved. This seizing as it were on the bared inner kernel of some fashionable vanity, and giving it its true and undisguised name and definition, often shocked ears polite. They called that "vulgar," which was only stripping selfishness or ignorance of its cloak, and bringing home to the hearts of the lowly-born the fact, that the follies of the great are akin to their own: the people laughed to find the courtier of the same flesh and blood; but the courtier drew up, and said, that it was vulgar to present him *en dishabille* to the commonalty. "Let them rail," said Boileau, to the poet, whose genius he so fully appreciated, "let them exclaim against you because your scenes are agreeable to the vulgar. If you pleased less how much better pleased would your censurers be!" "Le

* The king often danced in these ballets, till struck by some lines in the "Britannicus" of Racine, in allusion to Nero's public exhibitions of himself, he entirely gave up the practice; and soon after the appearing in them fell into such discredit, that, when Lulli took a part in that appended to the "Bourgeois Gentilhomme," the secretaries of the king refused to receive him among them on this account, and the king was obliged to interpose to bring them to reason.

Mariage Forcé" was the first of these *comédies ballets.* 1664.
The king danced as an Egyptian in the interludes Ætat.
while in the more intellectual part of the performance 42.
Molière delighted the audience as "Sganarelle" — the unfortunate man, who with such rough courtesy is obliged to take a lady for better or for worse; a plot, founded on the last English adventure of the count de Grammont, who, when leaving this country, was followed by the brothers of *la belle* Hamilton, who, with their hands on the pummels of their swords, asked him if he had not forgotten something left behind. "True," said the count, "I forgot to marry your sister;" and instantly went back to repair his lapse of memory, by making her countess de Grammont. The dialogue of this play is exceedingly amusing; the metaphysical or learned pedants, whom *Sganarelle* consults, are admirable and witty specimens of advisers, who will only give counsel in their own way, in language understood only by themselves. The "Amants Magnifiques" followed; it was written in the course of a few days: it is now considered the most feeble of Molière's plays; but it suited the occasion, and by a number of delicate and witty impersonations of the manners of the times, lost to us now, it became the greatest ornament of a succession of festivals; which under the name of "Plaisirs de l'Ile enchantée," were got up in honour of mademoiselle de Vallière; and, being prepared by various men of talent, gave the impress of ideal magnificence to the pleasures of Louis XIV. On this occasion Molière ventured to bring out the three first acts of the "Tartuffe," hoping to gain the king's favourable ear at such a moment. But it was ticklish ground; and Louis, while he declared that he appreciated the good intentions of the author, forbade its being acted, under the fear that it might bring real devotion into discredit. The "Tartuffe" was a favourite with Molière, who, degraded by the clergy on account of his profession, and aware that virtue and vice were neither inherent in priest nor actor according to the garb, was naturally very inimical to false devotion.

He still hoped to gain leave to represent his satire on hypocrites. He knew the king in his heart approved the scope of his play, and was pleased that his own wit should have been considered worthy of transfer to Molière's scenes — Molière himself venturing to remind him of the incident, which occurred during a journey to Lorraine, when Molière accompanied the monarch as his valet. When travelling, Louis was accustomed to make his supper his best meal, to which, of course, he brought a good appetite: one afternoon he invited his former preceptor, Perefixe, bishop of Rhodez, to join him; but the prelate, with affected sanctity, declined, as he had dined, and never ate a second meal on a fast-day. The king saw a smile on a bystander's face at this answer, and asked the cause. In reply, the courtier said, that it arose from his sense of the bishop's self-denial, considering the dinner he enjoyed. The detail of the dinner followed, dish after dish in long succession; and the king, as each viand was named, exclaimed, *le pauvre homme!* with such comic variety of voice and look, that Molière, who was present, felt the wit conveyed, and transferred it to his play, in which *Orgon*, in the simplicity of his heart, repeats this exclamation when the creature-comforts in which *Tartuffe* indulges are detailed to him. But though this compliment was not lost on the king, he did not yield; and Molière was obliged to content himself — after acting it at Raincy, the country-house of the prince of Condé—by reading it in society, and thus giving opportunity for it to awaken the most lively curiosity in Paris. There is a well-known print of his reading it to the celebrated Ninon de l'Enclos, whose talents and wonderful tact for seizing the ridiculous he appreciated highly; and to whom he partly owed the idea of the play, from an occurrence that befel her.* Yet he was not consoled

* The following is the story of Ninon de l'Enclos and the "Tartuffe":— When Gourville, the vissitudes of whose life were many and great, was, in 1661, in danger of being hanged, and was indeed hanged in effigy, he left two caskets full of money, one with Ninon, the other with a priest of his acquaintance, who affected great devotion. On his return, Ninon restored him his casket, and the value of money being increased, he was richer than

by these private readings and the sort of applause he thus gained, and he grew more bitter against the devotees for their opposition: in his play on the subject of Don Juan, "Le Festin de Saint Pierre," brought out soon after, he alludes bitterly to the interdiction laid on his favourite work. "All other vices," he says, "are held up to public censure; but hypocrisy is privileged to place the hand on every one's mouth, and to enjoy impunity." The hypocrites revenged themselves by calling his *Festin* blasphemous. The king, however, remained his firm friend, and tried to compensate for the hardship he suffered on this occasion by giving his name to his company, and granting him a pension in consequence.

It was the custom for the soldiers of the body guard of the king, and other privileged troops, to frequent the theatre without paying. These people filled the pit, to the great detriment of the profits of the actors. Molière, incited by his comrades, applied to the king, who issued an order to abrogate this privilege. The soldiers were furious; they went in crowds to the theatre, resolved to force an entrance; the unfortunate door-keeper was killed by a thousand sword-thrusts, and the rioters rushed into the house, resolved to revenge themselves on the actors, who trembled at the storm they had brought on themselves. The younger Bejart encountered their fury with a joke, that somewhat appeased them: he was dressed for the part of an old man; and came tottering forward, imploring them to spare the life of a poor old man, seventy-five years of age, who had only a few days of life left. Molière made them a speech; and peace was restored, with no greater injury than fear to the actors—except to one, who in his terror tried to get through a hole in the wall to escape, and

before. He offered this surplus to his friend; but she replied by threatening to throw the money out of window, if he said a word more on the subject. The priest acted in a different way: he said he had employed the sum deposited with him in pious works, having preferred the good of Gourville's soul to pelf, which might have occasioned his perdition. This story Ninon used to tell with such clever mimicry of the false devotee, that Molière declared he owed his best inspiration to her.

stuck so fast that he could neither get out nor in, till, peace being restored, the hole was enlarged. The king was ready to punish the soldiers as mutineers, but Molière was too prudent to wish to make enemies; when the companies were assembled, and put under arms, that the ringleaders might be punished, he addressed them in a speech, in which he declared that he did not wish to make them pay, but that the order was levelled against those who assumed their name and claimed their privilege: and that, in truth, a gratuitous entrance to the theatre was a right beneath their notice; and, by touching their pride, he brought them for a time to submit to the new order.

In holding up follies or vices to ridicule Molière made enemies; and by attacking whole bodies of men, dangerous ones; yet, how much did the public owe to the spirit and wit with which he exposed the delusions to which they were often the victims. He first attacked the *faculty*, as it is called in "L'Amour Médecin," in which he brings forward four of the physicians in ordinary to the king, empirics of the first order, under Greek names, invented by Boileau for the occasion: nor can we wonder, when we read the *mémoires* and letters of the times, at the contempt in which Molière held the medicinal art. One specific came into fashion after the other; quack succeeded to quack; and the more ignorant the greater was the pretension, the greater also the number of dupes. Reading these, and turning to the pages of Molière, we see in a minute that he by no means exaggerated, while he with his happy art seized exactly on the most ridiculous traits.

It has been said that the "Misanthrope," now considered by the French as Molière's *chef-d'œuvre*, was coldly received at first — a tradition contradicted by the register of the theatre; it went through twenty-one consecutive representations, and excited great interest in Paris. Still in this he raises his voice against the false taste of the age; and this with so little exaggeration, that the pit applauded the sonnet introduced in ridicule of the

prevailing poetry, and were not a little astonished when *Alceste* proves that it possesses no merit whatever. The audience, seeing that ridicule of reigning fashions was the scope of the play, fancied that various persons were intended to be represented; and, among others, it was supposed that the duke de Montauzier, the husband of the *Précieuse* Julie d'Angennes, was portrayed in *Alceste*. It is said, that the duke went to see the play, and came back quite satisfied; saying, that the "Misanthrope" was a perfectly honest and excellent man, and that a great honour, which he should never forget, was done him by assimilating them together. There is indeed in *Alceste* a sensibility, joined to his sincerity and goodness of heart, that renders him very attractive; and thus, as is often the case when genius mirrors nature, the ridicule the author pretends to wish to throw on the victim recoils on the apparently triumphant personages: the time-serving *Philinthe* is quite contemptible; and every honest heart echoes the disgust *Alceste* feels for the deceits and selfishness of society. In truth, there is some cause to suspect that Molière found in his own sensitive and upright heart the homefelt traits of *Alceste*'s character, as that that of his wife furnished him with the coquetry of *Célimène;* and when, in the end, the *Misanthrope* resolves to hide from the world, one of the natures of the author poured itself forth; a nature, checked in real life by the necessities of his situation and the living excitement of his genius.

During the same year the "Médecin malgré Lui" was brought out; whose wit and comedy stamps it as one of his best: other minor pieces, by command, occupied his time, without increasing his fame. His mind was set on bringing out the "Tartuffe." The king had yielded to the outcry against it; but in his heart he was very desirous of having it acted. On occasion of a piece being played, called "Scaramouche Hermite," which also delineated immorality cloaked by religion; the king said to the great Condé, "I should like to know why those who are so scandalised by Molière's play, say nothing

against that of *Scaramouche*?" The prince replied, "The reason is, that *Scaramouche* makes game of heaven and religion, which these people care nothing for; but Molière satirises them themselves, and this they cannot bear."* Confident in the king's support, and anxious to bring out his play, Molière entertained the hope of mollifying his opponents by concessions: he altered his piece, expunged the parts most disliked, and changed the name *Tartuffe*, already become odious to bigot ears, to the *Imposteur*. In this new shape his comedy was acted once; but, on the following day the first president, Lamoignon, forbade it. Molière dispatched two principal actors to the king, then in Flanders, to obtain permission; but Louis only promised that the play should be re-examined on his return. Thus, once more, the piece was laid aside; and Molière forced to content himself with private readings, and the universal interest excited on the subject. Meanwhile he brought out "Amphitryon," "L'Avare," and "George Dandin" all of which rank among his best plays. The first has a more fanciful and playful spirit added to its comedy than any other of his productions, and displays more elegance and a more subtle wit.

As a specimen of mingled wit and humour, let us take the scene between Sosia and Mercury, when the latter, assuming his name and appearance, attempts to deprive him of his identity by force of blows. Sosia exclaims,—

"N'importe. Je ne puis m'anéantir pour toi,
Et souffrir un discours si loin de l'apparence.
Etre ce que je suis est-il en ta puissance?
    Et puis-je cesser d'être moi?
S'avisa-t-on jamais d'une chose pareille?
Et peut-on démentir cent indices pressants?
    Rêvé-je? Est-ce que je sommeille?
Ai-je l'esprit troublé par des transports puissants?
    Ne sens-je bien que je veille?
    Ne suis-je pas dans mon bon sens?
Mon maître Amphitryon ne m'a-t-il pas commis
A venir en ces lieux vers Alcmène sa femme?
Ne lui dois-je pas faire, en lui vantant sa flamme,
Un récit de ses faits contre notre ennemi?
Ne suis-je pas du port arrivé tout à l'heure?
    Ne tiens-je pas une lanterne en main?
Ne te trouvé-je pas devant notre demeure?

* Preface to "Tartuffe."

Ne t'y parlé-je pas d'un esprit tout humain?
Ne te tiens-tu pas fort de ma poltronnerie,
Pour m'empêcher d'entrer chez nous?
N'as-tu pas sur mon dos exercé ta furie?,
Ne m'as tu pas roué d coups?
Ah, tout cela n'est que trop veritable;
Et, plût au ciel, le fût-il moins!
Cesse donc d'insulter au sort d'un misérable;
Et laisse à mon devoir s'acquitter de ses soins.

MERCURE.

Arrête, ou sur ton dos le moindre pas attire
Un assommant éclat de mon juste courroux.
Tout ce que tu viens de dire,
Est à moi, hormis les coups.

SOSIE.

Ce matin du vaisseau, plein de frayeur en l'âme,
Cette lanterne sait comme je suis parti.
Amphitryon, du camp, vers Alcmène sa femme,
M'a-t-il pas envoyé?

MERCURE.

Vous avez menti.
C'est moi qu'Amphitryon députe vers Alcmène.
Et qui du port Persique arrivé de ce pas;
Moi qui viens annoncer la valeur de son bras,
Qui nous fait remporter une victoire pleine,
Et de nos ennemis a mis le chef à bas.
C'est moi qui suis Sosie enfin, de certitude,
Fils de Dave, honnête berger;
Frère d'Arpage, mort en pays étranger;
Mari de Cléanthis la prude,
Dont l'humeur me fait enrager;
Qui dans Thèbes ai reçu mille coups d'étrivière;
Sans en avoir jamais dit rien;
Et jadis en public fus marqué par derrière
Pour être trop homme de bien.

SOSIE (*bas, à part*).

Il a raison. A moins d'être Sosie,
On ne peut pas savoir tout ce qu'il dit;
Et, dans l'étonnement dont mon âme est saisie,
Je commence, à mon tour, a le croire un petit.
En effet, maintenant que je le considère,
Je vois qu'il à de moi taille, mine, action.
Faisons-lui quelque question,
Afin, d'éclaircir ce mystère.

(*Haut.*)

Parmi tout le butin fait sur nos ennemis,
Qu'est-ce qu'Amphitryon obtient pour son partage?

MERCURE.

Cinq fort gros diamants en nœud proprement mis,
Dont leur chef se paroit comme d'un rare ouvrage.

SOSIE.

A qui destine-t-'il un si riche présent?

MERCURE.

A sa femme, et sur elle il le veut voir paroître.

SOSIE.

Mais où, pour l'apporter, est-il mis à présent?

MERCURE.

Dans un coffret scellé des armes de mon maître.

Sosie (*à part*).

Il ne ment pas d'un mot à chaque repartie,
Et de moi je commence à douter tout de bon.
Pès de moi par la force, il est déja Sosie,
Il pourroit bien encore l'être par la raison;
Pourtaut quand je me tâte et que je me rappelle,
Il me resemble que je suis moi.
Où puis-je rencontrer quelque clarté fidèle,
Pour démêler ce que je voi?
Ce que j'ai tait tout seul, et que n'a vu personne,
A moins d'être moi-même, on ne le peut savoir :
Par cette question il faut que je l'étonne;
C'est de quoi le confondre, et nous allons le voir.

(*Haut.*)

Lorsqu'on étoit aux mains, que fis-tu dans nos tentes,
Où tu courus seul te fourrer ?

Mercure.

D'un jambon ——

Sosie (*bas, à part*).

L'y voila !

Mercure.

Que j'allai déterrer,
Je coupai bravement deux tranches succulentes,
Dont je sus fort bien me bourrer.
Et, joignant à cela d'un vin que l'on ménage,
Et dont, avant le goût, les yeux se contentoient,
Je pris un peu de courage,
Pour nos gens qui se battoient.

Sosie.

Cette preuve sans pareille
En sa faveur conclut bien,
Et l'on n'y peut dire rien,
S'il n'étoit dans la bouteille."

And again, when Sosia tries to explain to Amphitryon how another himself prevented him from entering his house: —

" Faut-il le répéter vingt fois de même sorte?
Moi vous dis-je, ce moi, plus robuste que moi,
Ce moi qui s'est de force emparé de la porte,
Ce moi qui m'a fait filer doux ;
Ce moi qui le seul moi veut être,
Ce moi de moi-même jaloux,
Ce moi vaillant, dont le courroux
Au moi poltron s'est fait connoître,
Enfin ce moi qui suis chez nous
Ce moi qui s'est montré mon maître ;
Ce moi qui m'a roué de coups."

And his conclusive decision with regard to his master : —

" Je ne me trompois pas, messieurs, ce mot termine,
Toute l'irrésolution :
Le véritable Amphitryon
Est l'Amphitryon où l'on dine."

The "Avare" has certainly faults, which a great German critic has pointed out*; but these do not interfere with the admirable spirit of the dialogue, and the humorous display of the miser's foibles. "George Dandin" was considered by his friends as a more dangerous experiment. There were so many George Dandins in the world. One in particular was pointed out to him as being at the same time an influential person, who, offended by his play, might cause its ill success. Molière took the prudent part of offering to read his comedy to him, previously to its being acted. The man felt himself very highly honoured: he assembled his friends; the play was read, and applauded; and in the sequel supported by this very person when it appeared on the stage. Poor George Dandin! there is an ingenuousness and directness in him that inspires us with respect, in spite of the ridiculous situations in which he is placed: and while Molière represents to the life the annoyances to arise to a *bourgeois* in allying himself to nobility, he makes the nobles so very contemptible, either by their stupidity or vice, that not by one word in the play can a rank-struck spirit be discerned. As, for instance, which cuts the most ridiculous figure in the following comic dialogue? The nobles, we think. George Dandin comes with a complaint to the father and mother of his wife, with regard to her ill-conduct. His father-in-law, M. de Sotenville (the very name is *bien trouvé*,— sot en ville,) asks —

"Qu'est-ce, mon gendre? vous paroissez troublé.

GEORGE DANDIN.

Aussi en ai-je du sujet; et ——

MADAME DE SOTENVILLE.

Mon dieu! notre gendre, que vous avez peu de civilité, de ne pas saluer les gens quand vous les approchez!

GEORGE DANDIN.

Ma foi! ma belle-mère, c'est que j'ai d'autres choses en tête; et ——

MADAME DE SOTENVILLE.

Encore! est-il possible, notre gendre, que vous sachiez si peu votre monde, et qu'il n'y ait pas moyen de vous instruire de la manière qu'il faut vivre parmi les personnes de qualité?

GEORGE DANDIN.

Comment?

* Schlegel.

MADAME DE SOTENVILLE.

Ne vous déférez-vous jamais, avec moi, de la familiarité de ce mot de belle-mère, et ne sauriez-vous vous accoutumer à me dire Madame?

GEORGE DANDIN.

Parbleu! si vous m'appelez votre gendre, il me semble que je puis vous appeler belle-mère?

MADAME DE SOTENVILLE.

Il y a fort à dire, et les choses ne sont pas égales. Aprenez, s'il vous plait, que ce n'est pas à vous à vous servir de ce mot-là avec une personne de ma condition; que, tout notre gendre que vous soyez, il y a grande différence de vous à nous, et que vous devez vous connoître.

MONSIEUR DE SOTENVILLE.

C'en est assez, m'amour: laissons cela.

MADAME DE SOTENVILLE.

Mon dieu! Monsieur de Sotenville, vous avez des indulgences qui n'appartiennent qu'à vous, et vous ne savez pas vous faire rendre par les gens ce qui vous est dû.

MONSIEUR DE SOTENVILLE.

Corbleu! pardonnez-moi; on ne peut point me faire des leçons là-dessus; et j'ai su montrer en ma vie, par vingt actions de vigeur, que je ne suis point homme à démordre jamais d'une partie de mes prétentions: mais il suffit de lui avoir donné un petit avertissement. Sachons un peu, mon gendre, ce que vous avez dans l'esprit.

GEORGE DANDIN.

Puisqu'il faut donc parler catégoriquement, je vous dirai, Monsieur de Sotenville, que j'ai bien de ——

MONSIEUR DE SOTENVILLE.

Doucement, mon gendre. Apprenez qu'il ne'st pas respectueux d'appeler les gens par leur nom, et qu'à ceux qui sont au-dessus de nous, il faut dire Monsieur, tout court.

GEORGE DANDIN.

Hé bien! Monsieur tout court, et non plus Monsieur de Sotenville, j'ai à vous dire que ma femme me donne ——

MONSIEUR DE SOTENVILLE.

Tout beau! Apprenez aussi que vous ne devez pas dire ma femme, quand vous parlez de notre fille.

GEORGE DANDIN.

J'enrage! Comment, ma femme n'est pas ma femme?

MADAME DE SOTENVILLE.

Oui, notre gendre, elle est votre femme; mais il ne vous est pas permis de l'appeler ainsi; et c'est tout ce que vous pourriez faire si vous aviez épousé une de vos pareilles.

GEORGE DANDIN.

Ah! George Dandin, ou t'es-tu fourré?"

But we must leave off. Sir Walter Scott says that, as often as he opened the volume of Molière's works during the composition of his article on that author, he found it impossible to lay it out of his hand until he had completed a scene, however little to his immediate purpose of consulting it; and thus we could prolong

and multiply extracts to the amusement of ourselves and the reader; but we restrain ourselves, and, returning to the subject that caused this quotation, we must say, that we differ entirely from Rousseau and other critics who adopt his opinions; and even Schlegel, who accuses the author of being guilty of currying favour with rank in this comedy, and making honest mediocrity ridiculous. If genius was to adapt its works to the rules of philosophers, instead of following the realities of life, we should never read in books of honesty duped, and vice triumphant: whether we should be the gainers by this change is a question. It may be added, also, that Molière did not represent, in "George Dandin," honesty ill-used, so much as folly punished; and, at any rate, where vice is on one side and ridicule on the other, we must think that class worse used to whom the former is apportioned as properly belonging. In spite of philosophers, truth, such as it exists, is the butt at which all writers ought to aim. It is different, indeed, when a servile spirit paints greatness, virtue, and dignity on one side — poverty, ignorance, and folly, on the other.

At length the time came when Molière was allowed to bring out the "Tartuffe" in its original shape, with its original name. Its success was unequalled: it went through forty-four consecutive representations. At a period when religious disputes between molinist and jansenist ran high in France—when it was the fashion to be devout, and each family had a confessor and director of their consciences, to whom they looked up with reverence, and whose behests they obeyed—a play which showed up the hypocrisy of those who cloaked the worst designs, and brought discord and hatred into families, under the guise of piety, was doubtless a useful production; yet the "Tartuffe" is not an agreeable play. Borne away by his notion of the magnitude of the evil he attacked, and by his idea of the usefulness of the lesson, Moliere attached himself greatly to it. The plot is admirably managed, the characters excellently con-

trasted, its utility probably of the highest kind; but Molière, hampered by the necessity of giving as little umbrage as possible to true devotees, was forced by the spirit of the times to regard his subject more seriously than is quite accordant with comedy: there is something heavy in the conduct of the piece, and disgust is rather excited than amusement. The play is still popular; and, through the excellent acting of a living performer, it has enjoyed great popularity in these days in its English dress: still it is disagreeable; and the part foisted in on our stage, of the strolling methodist preacher, becomes, by its farce, the most amusing part in the play.*

Molière may now be considered as having risen to the height of his prosperity. Highly favoured by the king, the cabals formed against him, and the enemies that his wit excited, were powerless to injure. He was the favorite of the best society in Paris; to have him to read a play, was giving to any assembly the stamp of fashion as well as wit and intellect. He numbered

* There are some excellent observations on the moral of the "Tartuffe" in Sir Walter Scott's article on Molière, published in the seventeenth vol. of his prose works, in answer to Bourdaloue's violent philippic against this play. Scott argues with force and justice on the propriety of affixing the stigma of ridicule to the most hateful vice ever nurtured in the human heart — the assumption of the appearance of religion for worldly and wicked purposes; and he represents also the utility of the picture drawn to arrest in his course one in danger of incurring the sin of spiritual pride, by showing him that the fairest professions and strictest observances may be consistent with the foulest purposes. "The case of the 'Tartuffe,'" Sir Walter Scott thus sums up in his argument, "is that of a vilely wicked man, rendering the profession of religion hateful by abusing it for the worst purposes: and if such characters occurred, as there is little reason to doubt, in the time and court of Louis XIV., we can see no reason against their being gibetted in effigy. The poet himself is at pains to show that he draws the true line of distinction between the hypocrite and the truly religious man. When the duped *Orgon*, astonished at the discovery of *Tartuffe's* villainy, expresses himself doubtful of the existence of real worth, *Cléante* replies to him, with his usual sense and moderation:

> 'Quoi! parce qu'un fripon vous dupe avec audace,
> Sous le pompeux éclat d'une austère grimace,
> Vous voulez que partout on soit fait comme lui,
> Et qu'aucun vrai dévot ne se trouve aujourd'hui?
> Laissez aux libertins ces sottes conséquences:
> Démêlez la vertu d'avec ses apparences;
> Ne hazardez jamais votre estime trop tôt.
> Ne soyez pour cela dans le milieu qu'il faut.
> Gardez-vous, s'il se peut, d'honorer l'imposture,
> Mais au vrai zèle, aussi, n'allez pas faire injure;
> Et s'il vous faut tomber dans une extrémité,
> Péchez plutôt encor de cet autre côté.'"

among his chosen and dearest friends the wits of the age. Disappointment and vexation had followed him at home; and his wife's misconduct and heartlessness having led him at last to separate from her, he endeavoured to secure to himself such peace as celibacy permitted. As much time as his avocations as actor and manager permitted he spent at his country house at Auteuil: here he reserved an apartment for his old schoolfellow, the gay, thoughtless Chapelle; here Boileau also had a house; and at one or the other the common friends of both assembled, and repasts were held where wit and gaiety reigned. Molière himself was too often the least animated of the party: he was apt to be silent and reserved in society*, more intent on observing and listening than in endeavouring to shine. There was a vein of melancholy in his character, which his domestic infelicity caused to increase. He loved order in his household, and was annoyed by want of neatness and regularity: in this respect the heedless Chapelle was ill suited to be his friend; and often Molière shut himself up in solitude.

There are many anecdotes connected with this knot of friends: the famous supper, which Voltaire tries to bring into discredit, but which Louis Racine vouches for as being frequently related by Boileau himself occurred at Molière's house at Auteuil. Almost all the wits were there except Racine, who was excluded by his quarrel with Molière. There were Lulli, Jonsac, Boileau, Chapelle, the young actor Barron, and others. Molière was indisposed—he had renounced animal food and wine, and was in no humour to join his friends, so went to bed, leaving them to the enjoyment of their

* Molière thus describes himself in one of his pieces. A Lady says: "I remember the evening when, impelled by the reputation he has acquired, and the works he has brought out, Celimene wished to see Damon. You know the man, and his indolence in keeping up conversation. She invited him as a wit; but he never appeared so stupid as in the midst of a dozen persons she had made it a favour to invite to meet him, who looked at him with all their eyes, fancying that he would be different from every body else. They fancied that he would amuse the company with bon mots; that every word he should say would be witty, each speech an impromptu, that he must ask to drink with a point; and they could make nothing of his silence."

supper. No one was more ready to make the most of good cheer than Chapelle, whose too habitual inebriety was in vain combatted, and sometimes imitated by his associates. On this occasion they drank till their good spirits turned to maudlin sensibility. Chapelle, the reckless and the gay, began to descant on the emptiness of life — the vain nature of its pleasures — the ennui of its tedious hours: the other guests agreed with him. Why live on then, to endure disappointment after disappointment? how much more heroic to die at once! The party had arrived at a pitch of excitement that rendered them ready to adopt any ridiculous or senseless idea; they all agreed that life was contemptible, death desirable: Why then not die? the act would be heroic; and, dying all together, they would obtain the praise that ancient heroes acquired by self-immolation. They all rose to walk down to the river, and throw themselves in. The young Barron, an actor and protégé of Molière, had more of his senses about him: he ran to awake Molière, who, hearing that they had already left the house, and were proceeding towards the river, hurried after them: already the stream was in sight. When he came up, they hailed him as a companion in their heroic act, and he agreed to join them: "But not to-night:" he said "so great a deed should not be shrouded in darkness; it deserves daylight to illustrate it: let us wait till morning." His friends considered this new argument as conclusive: they returned to the house; and, going to bed, rose on the morrow sober, and content to live.

1670. Among such friends—wild, gay, and witty—Molière
Ætat. might easily have his attention directed to farcical and
40. amusing subjects. Some say that "Monsieur Porceaugnac" was founded on the adventure of a poor rustic, who fled from pursuing doctors through the streets of Paris: it is one of the most ridiculous as well as lively of his smaller pieces; but so excellent is the comic dialogue, that Diderot well remarks, that the critic would be much mistaken who should think that there were more men ca-

pable of writing "Monsieur Porceaugnac" than of composing the "Misanthrope." This piece has of course been adapted to the English stage; and an Irishman is burdened with all the follies, blunders, and discomfitures of the French provincial; with this difference, that the "brave Irishman" breaks through all the evils spread to catch him, and, triumphing over his rival, carries off the lady. The "Bourgeois Gentilhomme" deserves higher praise; and *M. Jourdain*, qualifying himself for nobility, has been the type of a series of characters, imitating, but never surpassing, the illustrious original. This play was brought out at Chambord, before the king. Louis listened to it in silence; and no voice dared applaud: as absence of praise denoted censure to the courtiers, so none of them could be amused; they ridiculed the very idea of the piece, and pronounced the author's vein worn out. They scouted the fanciful nonsense of the ballet, in which the *Bourgeois* is created Mamamouchi by the agents of the grand signor, and invested with a fantastic order of knighthood. The truth is, that Molière nowhere displayed a truer sense of fanciful comedy than in varying and animating with laughable doggrel and incidents the ballets that accompanied his comedies; the very nonsense of the choruses, being in accordance with the dresses and scenes, becomes wit. The courtiers found this on other occasions, but now their faces elongated as Louis looked grave: the king was mute; they fancied by sarcasm to echo a voice they could not hear. Molière was mortified; while the royal listener probably was not at all alive to the damning consequences of his hesitation. On the second representation, the reverse of the medal was presented. "I did not speak of your play the first day," said Louis, "for I fancied I was carried away by the admirable acting; but indeed, Molière, you never have written any thing that diverted me so much: your piece is excellent." And now the courtiers found the point of the dialogue, the wit of the situations, the admirable truth of the characters. They could remem-

ber that *M. Jourdain's* surprise at the discovery that he had been talking prose all his life, was a witty plagiarism from the count de Soissons' own lips — they could even enjoy the fun of the unintelligible mummery of the dancing Turks; and one of the noblest among them, who had looked censure itself on the preceding evening, could exclaim in a smiling ecstasy of praise: "Molière is inimitable — he has reached a point of perfection to which none of the ancients ever attained."

The "Fourberies de Scapin" followed — the play that could excite Boileau's bile; so that not all his admiration of its author could prevent his exclaiming: —

> "Dans ce sac ridicule où Scapin s'envelope,
> Je ne reconnais plus l'auteur du Misanthrope."

Still the comedy of tricks and hustle is still comedy, and will amuse; and there crept into the dialogue also the true spirit of Molière; the humour of the father's frequent question: "*Que diable alla-t-il faire dans cette galère,*" has rendered the expression a proverb.

The *Countess d'Escarbagnas* is very amusing. The old dowager, teaching country bumpkins to behave like powdered gold-caned footmen; her disdain for her country neighbours, and glory in her title, are truly French, and give us an insight into the deep-seated prejudices that separated noble and ignoble, and Parisians from provincials, in that country before the revolution.

The "Femmes Savantes" followed, and was an additional proof that his vein not only was not exhausted, but that it was richer and purer than ever; and that while human nature displayed follies, he could put into the framework of comedy, pictures, that by the grouping and the vivid colouring showed him to be master of his art. The pedantic spirit that had succeeded to the sentimentality of *les Précieuses,* the authors of society, whose impromptus and sonnets were smiled on in place of the exiled Platonists of the *ruelle,* lent a rich harvest. "Les Femme Savantes" echoed the conversations of the

select coteries of female pretension. The same spirit of pedantry existed some five and twenty years ago, when the blues reigned; and there was many a

> "Bustling Botherby to show 'em
> That charming passage in the last new poem."

That day is over: whether the present taste for mingled politics and inanity is to be preferred is a question; but we may imagine how far posterity will prefer it, when we compare the many great names of those days with the "small and far between" of the present. Bluism and pedantry may be the poppies of a wheat-field, but they show the prodigality of the Ceres which produces both. We are tempted, as a last extract, to quote portions of the scene in which the learned ladies receive their favourite, *Trissotin*, with enthusiasm, and he recites his poetry for their delight.

"PHILAMINTE.

Servez-nous promptement votre aimable repas.

TRISSOTIN.

Pour cette grande faim qu'à mes yeux on expose,
Un plat seul de huit vers me semble peu de chose;
Et je pense qu' ici je ne ferai pas mal
De joindre à l'épigramme, ou bien au madrigal,
Le ragoût d'un sonnet qui, chez une princesse,
Est passé pour avoir quelque délicatesse.
Il est de sel attique assaisonné partout,
Et vous le trouverez, je crois, d'assez bon goût.

ARMANDE.

Ah! je n'en doute point.

PHILAMINTE.

Donnons vite audience.

BÉLISE (*interrompant Trissotin chaque fois qu'il se dispose à lire*).

Je sens d'aise mon cœur tressaillir par avance.
J'aime la poésie avec entêtement,
Et surtout quand les vers sont tournés galamment.

PHILAMINTE.

Si nous parlons toujours, il ne pourra rien dire.

TRISSOTIN.

So——

BÉLISE.

Silence, ma nièce.

ARMANDE.

Ah! laissez-le donc lire!

TRISSOTIN.

Sonnet à la Princesse Uranie, sur sa fièvre.

Votre prudence est endormie,
De traiter magnifiquement,
Et de loger superbement,
Votre plus cruelle ennemie.

BE'LISE.

Ah ! le joli début.

ARMANDE.

Qu'il a le tour galant !

PHILAMINTE.

Lui seul des vers aisés possède le talent.

ARMANDE.

A *prudence endormie* il faut rendre les armes.

BE'LISE.

Loger son ennemie est pour moi plein de charmes.

PHILAMINTE.

J'aime *superbement* et *magnifiquement* :
Ces deux adverbes joints font admirablement.

BE'LISE.

Prètons l'oreille au reste.

TRISSOTIN.

Faites-la sortir, quoi qu'on die,
De votre riche appartement,
Où cette ingrate insolemment
Attaque votre belle vie.

BE'LISE.

Ah ! tout doux, laissez-moi, de grace, respirer.

ARMANDE.

Donnez-nous, s'il vous plait, le loisir d'admirer.

PHILAMINTE.

On se sent, à ces vers, jusqu'au fond de l'âme
Couler je ne sais quoi, qui fait que l'on se pâme.

ARMANDE.

'Faites-la sortir, quoi qu'on die,
De votre riche appartement.'
Que *riche appartement* est là joliment dit !
Et que la métaphore est mise avec esprit !

PHILAMINTE.

'Faites-la sortir, quoi qu'on die.'
Ah ! que ce *quoi qu'on die* est d'un goût admirable,
C'est, à mon sentiment, un endroit impayable.

ARMANDE.

De *quoi qu'on die* aussi mon cœur est amoureux.

BE'LISE.

Je suis de votre avis, *quoi qu'on die* est heureux.

ARMANDE.

Je voudrois l'avoir fait.

BE'LISE.

Il vaut toute une pièce.

PHILAMINTE.

Mais en comprend-on bien, comme moi, la finesse ?

ARMANDE et BE'LISE.

Oh, oh !

PHILAMINTE.

'Faites-la sortir, quoi qu'on die.'
Que de la fièvre on prenne ici les intérêts ;
N'ayez aucun égard, moquez-vous des caquets :
'Faites-la sortir, quoi qu'on die,
Quoi qu'on die, quoi qu'on die.'
Ce *quoi qu'on die* en dit beaucoup plus qu'il ne semble.
Je ne sais pas, pour moi, si chacun me ressemble ;
Mais j'entends là-dessous un million de mots.

BÉLISE.

Il est vrai qu'il dit plus de choses qu'il n'est gros.

PHILAMINTE, *à Trissotin.*

Mais quand vous avez fait ce charmant *quoi qu'on die*,
Avez-vous compris, vous, toute son énergie ?
Songiez-vous bien vous-même à tout ce qu'il nous dit,
Et pensiez-vous alors y mettre tant d'esprit ?

TRISSOTIN.

Hai ! hai !"

This scene proceeds a long time ; and at length the pedant, *Vadius,* enters, and *Trissotin* presents him to the ladies.

TRISSOTIN.

" Il a des vieux auteurs la pleine intelligence,
Et sait du grec, madame, autant qu'homme de France.

PHILAMINTE.

Du grec ! O ciel ! du grec ! il sait du grec, ma sœur.

BÉLISE.

Ah, my nièce, du grec !

ARMANDE.

Du grec ! quelle douceur !

PHILAMINTE.

Quoi ! monsieur sait du grec ? Ah ! permettez, de grace,
Que, pour l'amour du grec, monsieur, on vous embrasse."

The pedants at first compliment each other extravagantly, and then quarrel extravagantly ; and *Vadius* exclaims, —

" Oui, oui, je te renvoie à l'auteur des Satires.

TRISSOTIN.

Je t'y renvoie aussi.

VADIUS.

J'ai le contentement
Qu'on voit qu'il m'a traité plus honorablement.
* * * *
Ma plume t'apprendra quel homme je puis être.

TRISSOTIN.

Et la mienne saura te faire voir ton maître.

VADIUS.

Je te défie en vers, en prose, grec et latin.

TRISSOTIN.

Eh bien ! nous nous verrons seul à seul chez Barbin."

It must be remarked that, in the favourite of these learned ladies of the stage, *Trissotin*, the spectators perceived the Magnus Apollo of the real ones, l'abbé Cotin; and, as the epigram *Trissotin* recites was really written by Cotin, there can be no doubt that Molière held up the literary productions of the man to ridicule — but it is false that he made him personally laughable. Cotin was a priest; and, when Molière made *Trissotin* a layman, who aspired to the hand of one of the personages, he might believe that he took all personal sting from his satire. The public fixed the name of *Vadius* on Menage: the latter was far too clever to allow that the cap fitted. "Is it to be borne that this man should thus make game of us?" said madame de Rambouillet to Menage, on their return from the first representation of the play. "Madame," said Menage, "the play is admirable; there is not a word to be said against it."

Molière's career was drawing to a close; he was overworked, and did not take sufficient care of his health: he despised the medicinal art such as it then existed, and rejected its remedies. "What do you do with your doctor?" asked the king, when Molière applied for a canonicate for the son of M. de Mauvillain, the physician, whose patient he said "he had the honour to be." "We converse together," he replied; "he writes prescriptions which I do not take, and I recover." A weak chest and a perpetual cough was indeed best medicated by the sober regimen and milk diet to which he long adhered; and while he adhered to it his life seemed safe. Mutual friends had interfered with success in reconciling him and his wife; and the order of his simple table being altered by her presence, he yielded to her instigations in adopting a more generous diet: his cough became worse, in consequence.
1673. When he brought out the "Malade Imaginaire" he
Ætat. was really ill; but such was his sense of duty towards his fellow comedians, that he would not be turned from his intention of acting the principal character. The

play was warmly received. Though more adverse to our taste and tone than almost any of Molière's, it is impossible not to be highly amused. Sir Walter Scott well remarks, that the mixture of frugality and love of medicine in the "Malade Imaginaire" himself is truly comic: his credulity as to the efficacy of the draughts, and his resolution only to pay half-price for them — his anxious doubts of whether, in the exercise prescribed to him he is to walk across his room, or up and down — his annoyance at having taken one third less physic this month than he had done the last—and his expostulation at the cost,—"*C'est se moquer, il faut vivre avec les malades—si vous en usez comme cela, on ne voudra plus être malade—mettez quatre francs, s'il vous plait,*— is very comic; as is also the sober pedantry of *Thomas Diafoirus,* and his long orations, when he addresses his intended bride as her mother, is in the most amusing spirit of comedy. Meanwhile, as the audience laughed, the poet and actor was dying. On the fourth night he was evidently worse; Barron and others tried to dissuade him from his task. "How can I?" he replied, "There are fifty poor workmen whose bread depends on the daily receipt. I should reproach myself if I deprived them of it." It was with great difficulty however that he went through the part; and in the last entrée of the ballet, as he pronounced the word *juro,* he was seized by a vehement cough and convulsions, so violent that the spectators became aware that something was wrong; and the curtain falling soon after, he was carried home dying. His cough was so violent that a blood-vessel broke; and he, becoming aware of his situation, desired that a priest might be sent for. One after another was sent to, who, to the disgrace of their profession, refused the consolations of religion to a dying fellow-creature — to the greatest of their countrymen. It was long before one was found, willing to obey the summons; and, during this interval, he was suffocated by the blood that flowed from his lungs. He expired, attended only by a few friends, and by two sisters of charity, whom he was

accustomed to receive in his house each year, when they came to Paris to collect alms during Lent.

Dying thus, without the last ceremonies of the catholic religion, and, consequently, without having renounced his profession, Harley, archbishop of Paris, refused the rites of sepulture to the revered remains. Harley was a man of vehement, vindictive temper. His life had been so dissolute that he died the victim of his debaucheries — this was the very man to presume on his station, and to insult all France by staining her history with an act of intolerance.* Molière's wife was with him at his death; and probably at the moment was truly grieved by his loss — at least she felt bitterly the clerical outrage. "What," she cried, "refuse burial to one who deserves that altars should be erected to him!" She hastened to Versailles, accompanied by the curate of Auteuil, to throw herself at the king's feet, and implore his interference. She conducted herself with considerable indiscretion, by speaking the truth to royal ears; telling the king, that if "her husband was a criminal, his crimes had been authorised by his majesty himself." Louis might have forgiven the too great frankness of the unhappy widow — but her companion, the curate, rendered him altogether indisposed to give ear; when, instead of simply urging the request for which he came, he seized this opportunity of trying to exculpate himself from a charge of jansenism. The king, irritated by this *malapropos*, dismissed both supplicants abruptly; merely saying, that the affair depended on the archbishop of Paris. Nevertheless he at the same time gave private directions to Harley to take off

* Chapelle's Epigram on this insult to his friend's remains deserves mention: —

"Puisqu'à Paris on dénie
La terre après le trépas,
A' ceux qui, pendant leur vie,
Ont joué la comédie,
Pourquoi ne jette-t-on pas
Les bigots à la voirie?
Ils sont dans le même cas."

Boileau also alludes to the scandalous and impious treatment of his friend's remains.

his interdiction. The curate of the parish, however, in a servile and insolent spirit, refused to attend the funeral; and it was agreed that the body should not be presented in church, but simply conveyed to the grave, accompanied by two ecclesiastics. How deeply does one mourn the prejudice that caused the survivors to submit to this series of outrages; and the manners of the times that prevented their choosing some spot more holy than a parish church-yard, since it would be consecrated solely to Molière; and, disdaining clerical intolerance, bear him in triumph to the grave over which bigotry could have no control.

How far such an act was impossible at that time, when religious disputes and persecutions raged highly, is demonstrated by the conduct of the mob on the day of his funeral. Excited by some low and bigotted priests, a crowd of the vilest populace assembled before Molière's door, ready to insult the humble procession. The widow was alarmed — she was advised to throw a quantity of silver among the crowd: nearly a thousand francs, thus distributed, changed at once the intentions of the rioters; and they accompanied the funeral respectfully, and in silence. The body was carried, on the evening of the 21st of February, to the cemetery of 1673.
St. Joseph, Rue Mont Martre, followed by two priests, and about a hundred persons, either friends or acquaintances of the deceased, each bearing a torch. No funeral chaunt or prayer honoured the interment; but it must have been difficult in the hearts of attached friends or upright men to suppress the indignation such a vain attempt at contumely naturally excited.

Every one who knew Molière loved him. He was generous, charitable, and warm-hearted. His sense of duty towards his company induced him to remain an actor, when his leaving the stage would have opened the door to honours eagerly sought after and highly esteemed by the first men of the day. It was deliberated, to elect him a member of the French academy. The academicians felt that they should be honoured by such a mem-

ber, and wished him to give up acting low comedy; without which they fancied that the dignity of the academy would be degraded. Boileau tried to persuade his friend to renounce the stage, Molière refused: he said, he was attached to it by a point of honour. "What honour?" cried Boileau, "that of painting your face, and making a fool of yourself?" Molière felt that by honour he was engaged to give all the support he could to a company whose existence (as it was afterwards proved) depended on his exertions: and besides, his point of honour might mean a steady adherence to the despised stage; so that the slur of his secession might not be added to the ignominy already heaped upon it. He had a delicacy of feeling that went beyond Boileau — that of shrinking from insulting his fellow actors by seceding from among them, and of choosing to show to the world that he thought it no dishonour to exercise his talent for its amusement. In his heart, indeed, he knew the annoyances attached to his calling; when a young man came to ask him to facilitate his going on the stage, and Molière, inquiring who he was, learnt that his father was an advocate in good practice, on which he represented forcibly the evils that attend the life of an actor. "I advise you," he continued, "to adopt your father's profession — ours will not suit you; it is the last resource of those who have nothing better, or who are too idle to work. Besides, you will deeply pain your relations. I always regret the sorrow I occasioned mine; and would not do so could I begin again. You think perhaps that we have our pleasures; but you deceive yourself. Apparently we are sought after by the great; it is true, we are the ministers of their amusement—but there is nothing so sad as being the slaves of their caprice. The rest of the world look on us as the refuse of mankind, and despise us accordingly." Chapelle came in while this argument was going on; and, taking the opposite side, exclaimed: "Do you love pleasure? then be sure you will have more in six months as an actor than in six years at the bar." But Molière's

earnest and well-founded arguments were more powerful than the persuasions of his volatile friend.

In every point of view Molière's disposition and actions demand our love and veneration. He was generous to a high degree—undeviating in his friendship; charitable to all in need. His sense of Barron's talent and friendless position caused him to adopt him as a son; and he taught him the art in which both as a comic and tragic actor Barron afterwards excelled. One day the young man told him of a poor stroller who wanted some small sum to assist him in joining his company—Molière learnt that it was Mondorge, who had formerly been a comrade of his own; he asked Barron, how much he wished to give; the other replied, four pistoles. "Give him," said Moliere, "four pistoles from me—and here are twenty to give from yourself." His charities were on all sides very considerable; and his hand was never shut to the poor. Getting into a carriage one day, he gave a piece of money to a mendicant standing by; the man ran after the carriage, and stopt it, "You have made a mistake, sir," he cried out, "You have given me a louis d'or." "And here is another, to reward your honesty," replied Molière; and, as the carriage drove off, he exclaimed, "Where will virtue next take shelter" (*où la vertu va-t-elle se nicher!*), showing that he generalised even this simple incident, and took it home to his mind as characteristic of human nature. The biographer, Grimarest—who by no means favours him, and dilates on anecdotes till he turns them into romance—says, that he was very irritable, and that his love of order was so great that he was exceedingly discomposed by any want of neatness or exactitude in his domestic arrangements. That ill-health and the various annoyances he suffered as manager of a theatre, may have tended to render him irritable, is possible; but there are many anecdotes that display sweetness of disposition and great gentleness of mind and manner. Boileau, who was an excellent mimic, amused Louis XIV. one day by taking off all the principal

actors—the king insisted that he should include Molière, who was present; and afterwards asked him, What he thought of the imitation? "We cannot judge of our own likeness," replied Molière; "but if he has succeeded as well with me as with the others, it must needs be admirable. One day La Fontaine having drawn on himself an unusual share of raillery by his abstraction and absence of mind, Molière felt that the joke was being carried too far—"*Laissons-le,*" he said, "*nous n'effacerons jamàis le bon-homme,*"—the name bestowed on La Fontaine by his friends. We cannot help considering also in the same light, that of a heart true to the touch of a nature, which "makes the whole world kin," his habit of reading his pieces, before they were acted, to his old housekeeper, La Forêt. From the dullness or vivacity which her face expressed as he read, he judged whether the audience would yawn or applaud his scenes as acted. That she was a sensible old woman cannot be doubted; as when a play, by another author, was read to her as written by her master, she shook her head, and told Molière that he was cheating her.

As a comic actor Molière had great merit: he played broad farcical parts; and a description of his style is handed down to us both by his enemies and friends. Montfleuri (the son of the actor), in his satire, says,—

——— "Il vient le nez au vent,
Les pieds en parenthèse, et l'épaule en avant;
Sa péruque, qui suit le côté qui avance,
Plus pleine de lauriers qu'un jambon de Mayence;
Les mains sur les côtés, d'un air peu négligé,
La tête sur le dos, comme un mulèt chargé,
Les yeux fort égarés, puis débitant ses roles,
D'un hoquet perpétuel sépare les paroles."

No doubt, though a caricature, there is truth in this picture. We still see in his portraits the wig, thickly crowned with laurels; and theatrical historians have mentioned the sort of catching of the breath — exaggerated in the verses above quoted into a hoquet, or hiccough, — which he had acquired by his endeavour to moderate the rapidity of his articulation. The newspapers of the day,

in giving an account of him when he died, describe him as "actor from head to foot: he seemed to have many voices — for all spoke in him; and by a step, a smile, a trick of the eye, or a motion of the head, he said more in a moment than words could express in an hour." "He was," we find written in another newspaper, "neither too fat nor too thin; he was rather above the middle height, and carried himself well — he walked gravely, with a very serious manner; his nose was thick; his mouth large, his complexion dark; his eyebrows black and strongly marked, and the way in which he moved them gave great comic expression to his countenance." He acted well also, because, in addition to his genius, his heart was in all he did; and he wrote well from the same cause. He had that enthusiasm for his art which marks the man of genius. He did not begin to write till thirty-four — but the style of his productions, founded on a knowledge of mankind and of life, necessitates a longer apprenticeship than any other. When he did write it was with facility and speed. The whole of his comedies — each rising in excellence — were composed during the space of fourteen years; and Boileau addresses him as —

> "Rare et fameux esprit, dont la fertile veine
> Ignore en écrivant le travail et la peine."

But although when having conceived the project of a play his labour was light, his life, like that of all great authors, was spent in study — the study of mankind. Boileau called him the contemplator. He was silent and abstracted in company — he listened, and felt; and carried away a knowledge that displayed itself afterwards in his conception of character, in his perception of the ridiculous, in his portraitures of the human heart. Perhaps nothing proves more the original and innate bent of genius than the fact, that Molière was a comic writer. His sense of the ridiculous being intuitive, forced him to a species of composition, which, by choice, he would have exchanged for tragic and pathetic dramas: but he could only idealise in one view of life;

his imagination was tame when it tried to soar to the sublime, or to touch by tenderness. Of course he has not escaped criticism even in the pieces in which his genius is most displayed. Voltaire says that his farce is too broad, and his serious pieces want interest; and that he almost always failed in the *dénouement* of his plots. The latter portion of this remark is truer than the former; though there is foundation for the whole. Voltaire, like Boileau, was bitten by the then Gallic mania for classical (*i. e.* in modern literature, imitative instead of original) productions. Boileau too often considers that Molière sacrificed good taste to the multitude when he made his audience laugh. Boileau's poetry is arid, with all its wit; and he had no feeling for humour: his very sarcasms, full of point and epigram as they are, turn entirely on manner; he seldom praises or blames the higher portions of composition. Schlegel, in his bigotted dislike for all things French, by no means does Molière justice*; and many of his criticisms are quite false. As, for instance, that on the "Avare;" where he says, that no miser at once hides a treasure and lends money on usury. Any one who consults the history of our celebrated English misers of the last century will find that they, without exception, united the characters of misers and money-lenders.

It has been mentioned that Molière did not succeed in the serious, the sentimental, the fanciful. Voltaire mentions his little one-act piece of "L'Amour Peintre" as the only one of the sort that has grace and spirit. This slight sketch is evidently the groundwork of the "Barber of Seville;" it contains the same characters and the same situations in a more contracted space.

Similar to our Shakspeare, Molière held up a faithful mirror to nature; and there is scarcely a trait or a speech in any of his pieces that does not charm the reader as the echo of reality. It is a question, how far Molière indivi-

* He does less justice to his personal character even than to his works. No one can read the biographies of Molière without admiring the honourable, generous, and kindly nature of the man; Schlegel slurs over these qualities, and endeavours to stamp him as a mere court buffoon.

dualised general observations, or placed copies of real persons in his canvass. All writers of fiction must ground their pictures on their knowledge of life; and comic writers (comedy deriving so much of its excellence from slight but individual traits) are led more entirely into plagiarisms from nature. Sir Walter Scott is an instance of this, and could point out the original of almost all his comic characters. This may be carried too far; and the question is, to what extent Molière sinned against good taste and good feeling in holding up well-known persons to public ridicule. We have mentioned the story of his having paid M. de Soyecourt a visit, for the purpose of transferring his conversation to the stage, for the amusement of the king on the following day. This was hardly fair; while, on the other hand, he had full right to the count de Soissons *naïve* annunciation of the discovery that he had been speaking prose all his life, and putting it into M. Jourdain's mouth; and also to the anecdote we have related concerning Louis XIV. and the bishop of Rhodes, which he introduced into the "Tartuffe." Nor was it his fault that the name of *Tartuffe* became fixed on the bishop of Autun, as several allusions in madame de Sévigné's letters testify. There is, however, a difference to be drawn between the cap fitting after it is made, and its being made to fit. And in *Trissotin*, in the "Femmes Savantes," where the works of the abbé Cotin were held up to ridicule, we are apt to think that he went beyond good taste in his personality. The effect was melancholy. Cotin had long suffered from Boileau's attacks; but this last public one from Molière completely overwhelmed him, and he fell into a state of melancholy that soon after caused death. "Sad effect," writes Voltaire, "of a liberty more dangerous than useful; and which does not so much inspire good taste as it flatters the malice of men. Good poems are the best satires that can be levelled against bad poets; and Molière and Boileau need not, in addition, have had recourse to insult."

Molière died on the 17th of February, 1673, aged

fifty-one. His friends deeply mourned his loss, and many epitaphs were written in his honour. By degrees France became aware of the honour the country received from having given birth to such a man. The academicians of the eighteenth century endeavoured to atone for the folly of their predecessors. The bust of Molière was placed in their hall, with an appropriate inscription by Saurin: —

"Rien ne manque à sa gloire, il manquait à la nôtre."

In 1769, his eulogy was made the subject of a prize. It was gained by Chamfort; and, on the day of its public recital, two Poquelins were hunted out from their obscurity, and an honourable place assigned them among the audience; and there they sat, living epigrams on the bigotry which in former days expunged Molière's name from their genealogical tree.

His remains, unhonoured at first, were destined to several mutations during the revolution. A stone is at present erected to their honour, in the cemetery of Père la Chaise; but it may be considered a cenotaph, as there is every reason to doubt the identity of the remains placed beneath.

His troop of comedians did not long survive him. The theatre had been shut on his death, and not reopened till a fortnight after; when his widow, in contempt of decency, filled a part. She became manager; but was speedily deserted by the best actors, and soon after the use of the theatre was transferred to Lulli. Madame Molière applied to the king, and obtained the use of another; but within a few years this company no longer existed: amalgamated at first with that of the Marais, and soon after with that of the Hôtel de Bourgogne, there remained only one company of actors in France, called the king's troop. Molière's widow soon after married Guerin, an actor; her career was not reputable: frivolity and misconduct long deprived her of the public esteem. She continued to act till the 14th October, 1694, when she retired from the stage with

a pension of 1000 livres. From this time she partly redeemed past errors by leading a perfectly respectable life till she died, 30th November, 1700. Of Molière's three children one only survived, a daughter. She was placed in a convent by her mother; but, resisting her wish to take the veil, she returned home. A grown up daughter interfered with madame Guerin's arrangements; and Molière's orphan child was unhappy and neglected. Unable to induce her mother to make any arrangement for her marriage, she allowed herself to be carried off by M. Claude Rachel, sieur de Montalant, a widower with four children, and forty-nine years of age. Her mother was soon reconciled; and they all together went to live at Argenton. Madame de Montalant died in 1723, at the age of fifty-seven. She had no children; and not only does the posterity of Molière no longer exist, but even, the many descendants of his numerous brothers and sisters have left no trace — and the family of Poquelin is extinct.

LA FONTAINE.

1621—1695.

The life of this celebrated fabulist is marked by fewer incidents than the generality even of literary lives. Unambitious, indolent, "simple," it has been said, "as the heroes of his own fables," and subject to the most whimsical lapses of thought and memory, his habitual state was a sort of abstracted ruminating quietism, roused from which, he amused by his singularities, or delighted by his inspirations. He lived almost a stranger to the literary disputes of his time. Personal resentment or dislike was a feeling too uncongenial, and an effort too fatiguing, for him to sustain, beyond the excitement of the moment, even on two occasions when he was wantonly ill used. His designation of "bon homme," first applied to him by Boileau and Racine, then by the public, and since by posterity, paints him very happily. The particulars recorded of him are what would naturally be expected — traits of character rather than events.

Jean de la Fontaine was born on the 8th day of July, 1621, at Château Thierry. Some of his biographers have maintained his pretensions to nobility with a silly zeal. His father, Jean de la Fontaine, was master or keeper of the royal domains in his district, which appears to have been an honourable charge. The youth of the poet gave no promise of his future success. He was remarkable only for his dulness, and a certain easy tractable good nature. His teachers pronounced him a well disposed but hopeless dunce; but his father, a very zealous and still more undiscerning admirer of poetry, resolved that he should cultivate the muses, — and poor La Fontaine laboured with all the complaisance of filial duty. His efforts were vain. He could

not produce a rhyme,—he who afterwards rhymed with so much felicity and abundance, — and who alone, of all the poets of his country, before and since his time, has, by the disposition of his rhymes and the structure of his verses, completely vanquished the monotony of French versification.

The father did not abandon his cherished hopes until he beheld his son arrived at the age of nineteen, when, disappointed of making him a poet, he took the more feasible resolution of making him a priest. With no other fruits of education than such a stock of Latin as a dull boy could have acquired under a village schoolmaster, La Fontaine, now in his twentieth year, entered the religious order of the "oratoire,"— in passive compliance with the wishes of his father, and the example of his brother, a respectable ecclesiastic, who was affectionately attached to the poet, and who subsequently made over to him his share of their paternal inheritance. It may be set down among the instances of La Fontaine's characteristic simplicity, that he did not perceive his utter inaptitude for such a life. He renounced the cloister and returned to society after eighteen months. "The wonder is not," says the abbe Olivet, "that La Fontaine threw off the fetters of a monastic life, but that he ever assumed them;" to which it may be added, as a second wonder, that after living, as he did, in ease and freedom, without system or control, he was able to bear them so long.

It seems to have been his destiny in early life to have conditions chosen for him by others, and adopted by himself, with a curious opposition to his habits and character. Upon his return to the paternal roof, his father proposed to him the transfer of his charge, and a marriage with Marie d'Hericart, the daughter of a friend of his family. La Fontaine accepted both, with the same unthinking docility. The duties of his mastership of the royal domains were light and few, and his wife had talents and beauty; but he neglected alike his official and domestic obligations, with an innocent

unconsciousness of both which disarmed censure and silenced complaint.

It would appear that his father now thought once more of seeing him a poet, hopeless as this appeared to everybody else, and to none more than to La Fontaine. His perseverance was strangely rewarded at last. An accident, or an incident so described, called forth the latent fire at the age of twenty-two. The best company of the neighbourhood, and more particularly those who had any pretensions to literature, visited the father of La Fontaine. Among them an officer of the garrison at Château Thierry, a great admirer and reciter of verse, brought with him the poems of Malherbe, and read before young La Fontaine the ode on the assassination of Henry IV. beginning —

"Que direz vous races futures."

Between the lyric spirit of the poet, and the energy of the declaimer, La Fontaine's dormant faculty was suddenly excited. For some days he could think of nothing but the odes of Malherbe. He read them, recited them, spoke of them, with an unconscious and comic disregard of time, place, and persons. He commenced immediately writing odes in imitation of his great idol; and the happy father, on beholding his first essay, wept for joy. But if La Fontaine had written nothing else, or if he had always adhered to the same model, he would have left only the proofs of his own mediocrity, and of his father's want of taste. The choice of Malherbe was as unhappy a mistake of his peculiar genius as his previous destination had been of his character. That poet's forced thoughts and lofty diction are directly opposed to the simple graces of expression and imagination which characterise La Fontaine. He fortunately discovered his mistake, and the secret of his strength, chiefly through the advice of a judicious friend. This was a man of cultivated mind, named Pintrel, translator of the letters of Seneca. His name and his translation would doubtless have sunk into obli-

vion, were they not thus associated with the early studies of La Fontaine, who, ever grateful to the memory of his guide and friend, republished the forgotten translation.

La Fontaine's modern reading was hitherto confined to Malherbe, — his education, to just as much or as little Latin as was requisite for his admission to a religious order. Pintrel recommended to him the abandonment of Malherbe and verse-making for a time, and the studious perusal of Virgil, Horace, Terence, Livy, and Quintilian. He adopted this judicious counsel, and improved at the same time his knowledge of the Latin language and his taste. Horace, he long afterwards declared, in a letter to the learned Huet, bishop of Avranches, saved him from being spoiled by Malherbe.

It is a curious fact that, as La Fontaine became more conversant with those antique and eternal models of true beauty, he disrelished the French literature of his own time. He went back from the age of Louis XIV. to that of Francis I., preferring the simple and undisciplined manner of the one to the civilised, fastidious, and artificial system of the other. The mere English reader will understand the nature and the justice of this preference, by imagining an English writer, of the reign of Charles II., discarding the wits of that reign for the redundant and unadulterated literature of Elizabeth or Henry VIII.; and they who understand the ancient classics in their spirit and genius, not in external forms, will not be surprised by their producing this effect. The true antique is simple and indulgent, as well as elegant, noble, and governed by rules. It should not be forgotten, or lost sight of, however, that at this period the French literature of the age of Louis XIV. had not yet reached its distinctive character and excellence. The Balzacs, Voitures, and Cotins, with their conceits and mannerisms, had not yet been banished by the force of satire, and the example of better taste in Boileau and Moliere. Boileau had not yet written

his satires and art of poetry; Moliere had not yet dissected, and exposed on the stage, the verses of an admired court poet of the day. *

La Fontaine's favourite French writers, from the commencement to the end of his literary career, were Rabelais and Clement Marot; the one for his humour, invention, and happy manner of narrating, in his episodical and most eccentric tales, — the other for his gaiety and naiveté, — and both for the archaic simplicity of their diction. He also read with delight Ariosto, Boccaccio, and Machiavelli, — the last named not only in his lighter, but more serious works. Being asked why he preferred the writers of Italy to those of his own nation, he replied, in that tone of simplicity, bordering on silliness, which obtained him the name of "bon homme," that "they diverted him more." This avowed predilection for the great writers of Italy, at a time when they were not appreciated in France, when Boileau had the impertinence to speak lightly of "Messire Arioste," proves not only the instinctive correctness of his taste, but the independence of his judgment.

Wholly ignorant of the Greek language in his youth, he was too indolent to acquire it at a later period. Translations, and the help of a friend, named Maucroix, who aided him in his studies, like Pintrel, supplied this defect, — as far as it could be supplied. La Fontaine, in return, associated Maucroix, a good scholar, an indifferent poet, and a true friend, with his own immortality, in his letters and minor poems. It may be observed, that, when he resorts to the Greek writers, he seizes their spirit with a justness which would imply a knowledge of their language. This is ascribed to his early inti-

* Moliere, says Cailhava, in his "Art de la Comedie," indignant at the false taste of the court and the public, puts into the mouth of a courtier, in his "Misanthrope," a sonnet of Cotin, the most fashionable poet of the day, and a member of the academy. Bad taste was so accredited with the public, that the audience, on the first night of performance, applauded this nonsense to the echo, in perfect good faith. Moliere expected and only waited this effect to "pulverise" the sonnet and its admirers by the relentless and excellent criticism which he puts into the mouth of his misanthrope, Alceste.

macy with Racine, who was the most accomplished Greek scholar of his country, and explained as well as translated several portions of the Greek classics for the use of his friend. La Fontaine chiefly delighted in Plutarch and Plato. His partiality to the former may be easily conceived. The lives of Plutarch were calculated to charm his indolence and his imagination. There is something not quite so obvious in his choice of Plato. But the attentive reader will discover, in his fables and tales, traits of observation and ethical philosophy the most profound, as well as ingenious,—worthy of Plato, or of Machiavelli, — yet so happily disposed, and so simply expressed, as to appear perfectly in their place. The abbe Olivet mentions his having seen a copy of Plato once possessed by La Fontaine, and noted by him in such a manner as to betray the source of many of his maxims and observations.

It is curious and instructive to observe one who has been regarded as essentially the poet of nature—one supposed never to have meditated or read—thus storing his mind with knowledge from the best sources, and forming his taste after the best models. His verses even, indolent as he was, and easy and careless as they seem, were slowly and laboriously produced. He has declared this in his letters and prefaces, and it is attested by some who knew him. The fact cannot be too strongly impressed. Mistaken or misrepresented instances of uncultivated genius, and of composition without labour or length of time, too frequently stimulate ignorant and pretending mediocrity to teaze the press and the public with commonplaces, without value as without number.

La Fontaine continued some years at Château Thierry, obscure and indolent,—neglecting his charge, his family, and his fortune,—reading his favourite authors, writing verse, and translating Terence. The preface to his poem of "Adonis," and its being composed in heroic verse, for which he had an early predilection, would imply that it was written during this period. Most of his other earlier verses have been lost through his neglect

of the manuscripts; but, judging by some early pieces given in his posthumous works, their disappearance is scarcely to be regretted.

The monotony of his rural life was broken only by a visit to Paris, or some village adventure. The following affair is truly curious, as illustrating the character of the man: — Some self-called friends, either in jest or malice, intimated to him that the frequent visits of an old military officer, named Poignan, at his house, compromised the reputation of madame La Fontaine, and that her husband was bound in honour to challenge him. La Fontaine, the most negligent of husbands, and the most easy and credulous of mankind, listened implicitly to their counsel, made an extraordinary effort to rise at five in the morning, girded on his sword, sallied forth, and found Poignan in bed. "My dear friend," said the old captain, "what brings you out so early? Has any misfortune happened? Is your house on fire?" "Rise, and follow me," said the poet. The captain repeated and reiterated his entreaties for some explanation, but in vain. He was obliged to leave his bed, arm himself, and follow La Fontaine, without the remotest idea of his purpose. After they had gone some short distance, La Fontaine stopped, drew his sword, and desired his companion to draw and defend himself.

The latter, having no alternative, drew in his own defence; and, with his superior address as a military man, disarmed the poet at the first pass. He now obtained an explanation. "They have told me," said La Fontaine, "that I ought to fight you, because you go to my house to see my wife." "My dear friend," replied the captain, who was past the age of gallantry, and, having neither family nor occupations, sought, in his visits, only an escape from ennui, "you have been abused, and I slandered: but, to set your mind quite at ease, I will never again cross your threshold, grievous as the privation is to me." "No, my friend," rejoined the poet, "I have satisfied them by

fighting you, as they advised me, and henceforth you shall come to my house more frequently than ever." This anecdote is scarce reconcilable with the maxims of one who reduced the question of conjugal fidelity to the following dilemma : — " Quand on ne le scait pas, ce n'est rien — quand on le scait c'est peu de choses." But it has passed without question in every biographical notice of him.

La Fontaine, according to some accounts, was an unfaithful as well as negligent husband. But his rural gallantries, besides the uncertain evidence of them, are too frivolous to be noticed here.

Opinions and representations are divided as respects madame La Fontaine. According to some, her talents and beauty were marred by an imperious temper, and she was the very original of " Madame Honesta," in the tale of Belphegor, who was

> " D'une orgueil extreme ;
> A et d'autant plus, que de quelque vertu
> Un tel orgueil paraissait revetu."

La Fontaine, they add, accordingly, like the husband in Belphegor, took occasion to absent himself as often and as long as he could. Others, again, assert that the lady was gentle as she was beautiful, and that her husband bore testimony to her good qualities of temper expressly, as well as to her taste, by submitting to her his poetical labours. It may be said, that the neglect and absences of such a husband as La Fontaine form no presumption against the conjugal temper of his wife. Some anecdotes related of his negligence and distractions startle belief. Despatched by his father to Paris, on business the most important and most urgent, he met a friend, dined with him, went to the play with him, supped with him, took up his lodging for the night in his house, and returned to Château Thierry next day. " Well, you have arranged every thing satisfactorily ?" said the father. La Fontaine opened wide his eyes in astonishment. He had wholly forgotten the matter till that moment! Going to Paris on another occasion, with papers,

upon which depended his private fortune and his public charge, he was overtaken by the postman. "Monsieur," said the latter, "has dropped some papers on the way." "No, no," replied the poet. But the other, knowing with whom he had to do, or having discovered from the papers to whom they belonged, requested him to examine his saddle-bags; upon which he remembered, for the first time, that he even had papers to lose. In his reveries and distractions, he was unconscious not only of the lapse of time but of the inclemency of the weather. He loved reading and musing in the open air. The duchess of Bouillon left him one morning, with a Livy in his hand, pacing up and down between two rows of trees. On her return in the evening she found him still pacing and reading in the same place. What made this the more extraordinary was a heavy fall of rain in the interim, and La Fontaine having all the time had his head uncovered.

He probably owed, and the world owes it, to his acquaintance with the duchess of Bouillon, that he did not pass his life idly and obscurely at Château Thierry. This lady was one of the celebrated *Mancinis,* nieces of Cardinal Mazarin. She inherited her uncle's ambition, sagacity, and love of intrigue: she shared with her sisters wit, gaiety, and the graces; and, with her family, a taste for literature. Whilst living in court disgrace at Château Thierry, some verses of La Fontaine happened to meet her eye. She immediately had the poet introduced to her, and soon became his friend. She had, it is said, the merit of discerning not only his genius but its peculiar bent. La Fontaine had yet written neither tales nor fables. She advised him to devote himself to simple and playful narrations in verse. His first tales in point of time, and some of the first in point of merit, are said to have been composed by him according to her suggestions, both of the matter and the manner. He is supposed indebted to her for that grace and delicacy of perception and expression which he combined with so much of simplicity and nature. He

lived in her intimate society, and that alone must have been a great advantage to him. The conversation of a woman who knew the world, loved poetry, and judged of both with discernment, must have been the best school for one so simple and inexperienced, yet so ingenious and inspired, as La Fontaine.

It may appear strange that La Fontaine, a simple bourgeois, and village poet, was thus familiarly treated by a woman of the highest rank. His charge even placed him in the relation of a servant to the duke of Bouillon, her husband, who held some superior and sinecure charge of the royal domains. But, strongly as the gradations of birth and title were marked in France, it will be found that sense, wit, and genius conferred privilege, or, like love and death, levelled all degrees. Voiture, the son of a vintner, was the companion of princes, the lover of princesses, and would never have been reminded of his birth, had he not had the weakness to be ashamed of it; and even then only in pleasantries, which he well deserved for his weakness and vanity. A court lady, provoked by his conceit, one evening, whilst "playing at proverbs," as it was called, said to him, "Come, that won't do; give us a fresh tap — (*percez nous en d'un autre*)."

The duchess of Bouillon, on the expiration or remission of her exile, took La Fontaine with her to Paris. He now became known to the persons most distinguished in the capital for rank and genius in the circles of his patroness, and of her sister, the celebrated duchess of Mazarin, so well known for her wit, graces, gallantries, and conjugal disputes. Both sisters continued the friends of La Fontaine through life, and exercised great influence over his writings. Their characters may be illustrated, in passing, by a single anecdote. It is related in the memoirs of the duchess of Mazarin, — written by herself, or under her immediate direction.

Their breaches of court discipline subjected them frequently to mitigated imprisonments, — sometimes at their own seats, sometimes in a convent, where the

offence demanded a more serious lesson of penance and reform. Having been on one occasion consigned to the same convent they amused themselves by putting ink into the holy water. The nuns, who on their way to matins and vespers dipped their fingers in the font, and crossed their foreheads with the sacred lymph, on meeting in the chapel, beheld upon each other's brows, with surprise and terror, the dark signs of reprobation.

La Fontaine doubtless owed that finesse of expression which sometimes palliates, if it does not redeem, the freedom of his pleasantries, to his intercourse with two persons so witty, accomplished, and unconstrained.

Soon after his arrival in Paris he formed that union of friendship between him, Molierè, Boileau, and Racine, which death only interrupted. These celebrated men appreciated his genius, before it yet received the stamp of public admiration, and always regarded him with affection. Boileau and Racine, indeed, amused themselves with his simplicity, and treated him sometimes with a certain air of protection. The conversation happening to turn one evening, at a supper party where they were, upon the dramatic probability of what are called stage whispers or "asides," La Fontaine said it was absurd to suppose that what was heard by the whole audience could escape a person on the stage. A discussion ensued, as it commonly happened when any question of art or literature was started, even in the highest circles, — so different from modern fashionable life. "Don't you think La Fontaine a great rogue?" said Boileau, to his nearest neighbour, aside, but loud enough to be heard, and laughed at by everybody except La Fontaine, who was thinking of something else. The argument, as well as the laugh, was immediately turned against him; but most illogically, for the fact proved not the reasonableness of "asides;" it was evidence only of La Fontaine's distractions. "Let them laugh," said Moliere, "le bon homme will take a flight beyond them — (*le bon homme ira plus loin*

qu'eux)." This prediction has been verified; La Fontaine's reputation has been uniformly spreading and rising, in spite of the disposition, even in France, during and since the latter half of the last century, to detract from the age of Louis XIV. It is worth remarking, with reference to this anecdote, that, of all the poets of that age, he and Molière alone have maintained their pre-eminence undisputed through every change of taste and time.

La Fontaine now passed his life in the coteries of the duchesses of Bouillon and Mazarin, Boileau and Racine, without giving a thought to his home or family. Boileau and Racine, both strictly religious moralists, were scandalised by his complete separation from his wife, and pointed out to him its indecency. Simple and docile, as usual, he admitted the justice of their remonstrance; said the impropriety of his conduct had never occurred to him; and, to make amends, he said he should go and see his wife without delay. He set out for Château Thierry the next morning, and came back the succeeding day. His friends made their inquiries respecting madame La Fontaine. "I did not see her," said he. "How," said they, "not see her? was she from home?" "Yes; she was gone to prayers; and the servant, not knowing me, would not let me stay in the house till she returned." In this extremity the poor poet, shut out of his own house, went to that of a friend, where he dined, supped, and slept; and from which he started for Paris next morning, without seeing his wife, or making his house a second visit.

The most imperative of all motives, however, the want of money, sometimes sent him to Château Thierry, for the purpose of selling part of his estate, to provide for his expenses at Paris. His improvident practice, of consuming the principal after the interest was gone, "*mangant son fonds aprez son revenu*," as he himself expressed it, together with his wife's want of economy —for in this at least they perfectly agreed,—would

have soon left him destitute, if he had not become known to the celebrated and unfortunate Foucquet. That prodigal financier and magnificent patron, upon being made acquainted with the genius, character, and wants of La Fontaine, settled on him a liberal pension, to be paid quarterly, on the condition of a quarterly quittance in verse; and this condition he religiously fulfilled. His pension, or rather his gratitude, dictated to him some of the most beautiful of his smaller pieces. He celebrated and ministered to the fêtes and gallantries, and sang the groves, gardens, and fountains, of *Vaux*,— that princely residence, which Foucquet adorned with all that wealth, prodigality, and the arts could produce; and which, it has been supposed, contributed not a little to his ruin, by provoking the jealous or envious pride of Louis XIV.

Though La Fontaine's acknowledgments are grateful, they are not servile. Whatever appears exaggerated at the present day fell far short of the tone of his cotemporaries, and is moreover nobly borne out by his fidelity in his patron's memorable disgrace.

Foucquet provoked, not only the displeasure, but the personal jealousy and vengeance of Louis XIV., by rivalling him in princely magnificence at Vaux; and in gallantry, it has been said, by making pretensions to the royal mistress La Valliere*; yet had La Fontaine not only the generosity to adhere to him, but the courage, for such it was, to solicit his pardon of Louis XIV., in an elegy full of touching pathos and philosophy. Alluding to the fickleness of fortune and court favour, he says:—

> "On n'y connait que trop les jeux de la fortune,
> Ses trompeuses faveurs, ses appas inconstans,
> Mais on ne les connait que quand il n'est plus temps."

To move Louis he brings before him the example of Henry IV.—

> "Du magnanime Henri qu'il contemple la vie,
> Des qu'il put se venger, il en perdit l'envie."

* Vie de La Fontaine, par Walknaer.

Louis, however, alike insensible to justice, mercy, and poetry, changed, by a mockery of commutation, the minister's sentence of banishment into solitary confinement for life. Colbert, the enemy and successor of Foucquet, could not forgive the crime of fidelity to a fallen patron in a poet, and took away La Fontaine's pension.

La Fontaine, it has been observed, was in his twenty-third year before he gave the least indication of the poetic faculty. He had passed his fortieth before his genius and reputation attained their full height and splendour. A small volume, entitled "Contes et Merveilles en vers," published with his name, in 1664, determined his place as a poet, established his supremacy over all fabulists, modern and ancient, and formed an epoch in French literature. His fortune did not improve with his fame. It is true that his celebrity made him known to the prince of Condé and the duke and abbé de Villars, by whom, as well as by the duchesses of Bouillon and Mazarin, he was occasionally and liberally supplied; but his want of all order and economy rendered their liberality unavailing, because it was irregular and occasional.

He joined in the universal pæan of the day to Louis XIV. His tale of "Psyche and Cupid" is disfigured by episodic descriptions of the magnificence of Versailles, with a due seasoning of compliment to the great king; but he continued unpatronised, even after the death of Colbert, whose injustice to La Fontaine is a stain upon his otherwise illustrious memory. The neglect, or, it may be termed, the exception of him by Louis, who was so munificent to other men of genius, has been accounted for.* That monarch admired and rewarded only those talents which ministered to his pride or his pleasures — to the splendours of his court or government. He had a taste only for the grand, the gorgeous, and the adulatory. Boileau owed the royal favour to two indifferent odes much more than to his

* Champfort. — Eloge de La Fontaine.

satires, epistles, art of poetry, and Lutrin; and Moliere, to those court ballets in which Louis danced, rather than to his dramatic *chefs d'œuvre.* Louis XIV. had the same distaste for La Fontaine as a poet and Teniers as a painter; and, from the same principle,— he could not admire humble subjects, treated in a true and simple, however charming, style. He would not condescend to understand the language of "Jean Lapin" and "Maître Corbeau." La Fontaine offered him incense in his way; but it was not of the kind acceptable to the idol; and he continued neglected, even when, in an evil hour, he sang the revocation of the edict of Nantes. La Fontaine was also in bad odour with the intriguing devotees of the court; and Louis, a weak bigot, with all his arrogance and pride, may have been indisposed towards him on this account, from their suggestions or his own.

The loss of his pension thus remained unsupplied; and he continued once more carelessly spending "*son fonds aprez son revenu,*" when he came under the notice of the most accomplished, enlightened, and amiable princess of her time — Henrietta of England, daughter of Charles I., most unworthily married to the duke of Orleans, brother of Louis XIV. She attached him to her suite, as one of the gentlemen of her household, with a salary to receive, and no service, beyond some volunteer verses, to perform. But La Fontaine had not long enjoyed her patronage when the princess died, under suspicion of poison, regretted by all France, her husband excepted; and La Fontaine was once more in distress — if that to which he was wholly insensible can be so termed. He seems to have derived from nature the happy or unhappy insensibility to the accidents of life, which some ancient philosophers attained only through the severest exercise of reason and discipline.

It appears to have been his fortune to be indebted to the discernment and kindness of women. Among the persons uniting high rank to a taste for literature, with

whom he became acquainted at Paris, was madame de la Sabliere. This accomplished and kind-hearted woman, perceiving La Fontaine's utter inability to regulate the economy of the simplest household, relieved him of all care at once by giving him an apartment in her house. Here he passed twenty (the happiest) years of his life, relieved from all anxiety, — his wants supplied, and his humour indulged, with the utmost attention and kindness. Some of his pieces are dedicated to his benefactress, and he has celebrated her name in verse, but with reserve and delicacy. Madame de la Sabliere had the good taste to control the poet's expression of his feelings in their particular relation to each other.

He composed during this period the most popular of his tales, "Joconde," and dedicated it to madame de la Sabliere. It is the most justly admired of all his tales; and, being imitated from Ariosto, placed him in a state of rivalry with the great Italian poet. An officer in the household of the duke of Orleans, named Bouillon, gave at the same time a rival version, and persons were found courtly or tasteless enough to prefer it to La Fontaine's. The question was even made the subject of a wager; and the arbiter appealed to declined giving an opinion. Boileau did indignant justice to genius and his friend, and Bouillon's "Joconde" was no more heard of. "La Fontaine," says Boileau, "imitated Ariosto as Virgil imitated Homer, and Tasso Virgil; Bouillon like a trembling valet, who dared not put one foot before the other without his master's leave." He even insinuates that La Fontaine had treated the subject in a manner superior to Ariosto himself. There is, it is true, in La Fontaine's manner, a simplicity, and ease, and graceful levity, somewhat more suitable to the matter and to a mere fabulist. But those who are acquainted with the Italian poet will consider any deficiency of these minor graces in him much more than redeemed by his superior richness, and variety of invention, and vigour of imagination.

The society of madame de la Sabliere comprised princes, nobles, poets, and philosophers. She cultivated science as well as literature, — but in secret. Bernier, who also had an apartment in her house, gave La Fontaine some notions in natural philosophy. It was under this influence, whilst his head was filled with physical science, that he wrote his poem on Jesuits' bark (Le Quinquina) — a dull production, on a barren subject; which, however, was not then quite so uninviting as it may appear now. Bark had just performed what were deemed marvellous cures on Louis XIV. and Colbert, and it was sold by the Jesuits at its weight in gold. Colbert had the littleness to be unjust to La Fontaine; but the poet had the magnanimity to be just to the minister. He alludes to him in this poem in a tone of manly, independent, and merited praise.

La Fontaine added considerably to the number of his fables and tales, and wrote several dramatic pieces, whilst he lived under the roof of madame de la Sabliere. His dramas, chiefly operas and light comedies, with an attempt or two at tragedy, are below mediocrity. He wanted the dramatic instinct. There are scenes of easy graceful dialogue, but strung together without art or interest. Some were written by him in partnership with the comedian Champmèlè, husband of the celebrated actress of that name, who played in the tragedies and figures in the life of Racine, and in the letters of madame de Sévigné. It is told of him that, whilst sitting in the pit, during the first performance of one of his own operas, he fell asleep! But this is too much, even for La Fontaine; and it should not be forgotten, that an opera was the cause of the only satire he ever wrote, and of one of the only two quarrels he ever had. The celebrated Lulli obtained his easy promise to write him an opera on the story of Daphne, teased him until it was completed, and then capriciously adopted the "Proserpine" of Quinault. La Fontaine, now an old man, or, as he called himself, "*un enfant à barbe grise*," a child with a grey beard, knew, for the first

time, what it was to feel personal resentment, and wrote the satire entitled "Le Florentin." It is merely a narrative of the affair between him and Lulli, in the manner of his tales. But he was soon and easily reconciled; and he complained afterwards that the little gall in him was stirred by others on the occasion.

The only symptom of literary ambition ever shown by La Fontaine was his desire to become a member of the French academy. A vacancy having occurred in 1683, he became a candidate. The devotees at court opposed and denounced him as a mere writer of frivolous and licentious tales, fit only to rank with Clement Marot and Rabelais, and unworthy of a place in that grave and learned body. Yet was he elected the successor of the great Colbert, whose death had caused the vacancy, and in opposition to Boileau, by a majority of sixteen to seven. Louis XIV. never interfered in the elections; but his sanction was necessary before the elected candidate could be received. He withheld his approbation for several months, from his dislike of La Fontaine, and his pique at the rejection of Boileau, then his chief eulogist and historiographer. So anxious was La Fontaine during the interval, that he solicited the interest of the royal mistress, madame de Montespan, through her sister, madame de Thiars, and addressed a supplicatory ballad to Louis XIV. Another vacancy soon occurred; Boileau was elected; and a deputation of the academy waited on Louis to acquaint him. His reply was, "Your choice of M. Boileau will be universally approved, and you may now receive La Fontaine. He has promised to be good — (*il a promisé d'être sage*")*.*

He certainly wrote fewer tales henceforth; but it is doubtful whether this did not proceed more from indolence than the promise of reformation. The private sittings of the academy, also, "diverted" him, as he expressed it, during those hours which he before consumed in diverting himself with writing verse. His becoming a member of the academy led to his second

and last quarrel, and in a manner truly worthy of La Fontaine. This authentic fact goes a great way in establishing the credit of other anecdotes deemed untrue or exaggerated from their improbability. The French academy was at this time engaged in its great undertaking of a dictionary which should fix the French language. The abbe Furetiere, then a popular writer, and one of "the forty," announced a dictionary of the French language in his own name. He was immediately charged with pirating the common stock. A ferment was excited in the academy, and throughout the republic of letters in France. Furetiere, publicly arraigned, defended himself with keen and virulent personalities, and, after several discussions, was expelled. La Fontaine was one of the minority in his favour, and meant to give him his vote; but unluckily, in one of his usual distractions, dropped his ball, by mistake, in the rejecting compartment of the balloting-box. Furetiere would not pardon the blunder, and attacked him bitterly. After an exchange of epigrams, which did credit to neither, La Fontaine thought of the affair no more; but was never reconciled.

Furetiere, in his vengeance, revealed the secrets of the learned assembly. If his account may be relied on, the process by which the academy proposed its famous dictionary was truly laughable. "He only is right," says Furetiere, "who talks loudest: one makes a long speech upon some trifle; another echoes the nonsense of his predecessor; sometimes three or four talk at the same time. When five or six are in close committee, one reads, another delivers his opinion, two are chatting together, a fifth looks over some dictionary which may happen to be on the table, and the sixth is sleeping." The treachery of the disclosure was condemned, but its truth generally admitted; and the private sittings of the academy were the theme of public ridicule and amusement, like the consultations of physicians, so pleasantly treated by Molière.

Whatever excuse there may have been for Furetiere's

bitterness against his adversaries and the academy, there was none for his attack on La Fontaine. The blunder was provoking, but committed most innocently. La Fontaine's character placed his good faith beyond all doubt. His singularities were so well known that his mistakes and eccentricities were chartered in society, and excused even by Louis XIV. Having been introduced to the royal presence to present one of his works, he searched, and searched in vain, for the votive volume, and then frankly told the king that he had forgotten it! "Let it be another time, M. de la Fontaine," said the monarch, with a graciousness and good humour which did him honour, and dismissing the poet with a purse of gold. This misadventure did not quicken his attention even for the moment: he left his purse of gold behind him in the carriage.

The stories of his careless apathy, and absences of mind, are numberless. Meeting, at a large dinner party, a young man with whose conversation he seemed pleased, somebody asked his opinion of him. "He is a young man of sense and promise," said La Fontaine. "Why, it is your own son," said the questioner. "Ah! I am very glad of it," rejoined the father, with the utmost indifference. He had forgotten that he even had a son; who fortunately had been taken charge of and educated by others. La Fontaine treated religion with the same indifference as all other subjects, however serious. Racine took him one day to an extraordinary service, on one of the festivals of the Roman-catholic church. Knowing that the service would be long, and apprehending the effect upon La Fontaine, he gave him a small bible to read, as a preventative against sleeping, or some other indecorum. The book happening to open before him at the lesser prophets, his attention soon became wholly absorbed by the prayer of the Jews in Baruch. It took the same possession of his imagination in his advanced age as the ode of Malherbe in his youth. His first question to everybody was, "Have you read Baruch? Do you

know he was a man of genius?" This was his common expression for some time to all whom he met, without distinction of persons, from a buffoon to a bishop.

It was one of his singularities, that, when anything took his fancy, he could think of nothing else for the time; and he introduced his favourite topic, or favourite author, in a manner at once unseasonable and comic. One day, whilst in company with the abbe Boileau, his head full of Rabelais, whom he had just been reading, he abruptly asked the grave ecclesiastic which he thought had more wit, Rabelais or St. Austin. Some were shocked, others laughed; and the abbe, when recovered from his surprise, replied, "M. de la Fontaine, you have put on your stocking the wrong side out," which was really the fact. Wishing to testify his respect for the celebrated Arnaud, he proposed dedicating to him one of the least scrupulous of his tales, in which a monk is made to cite scripture in a manner far from edifying. Boileau and Racine had the utmost difficulty in making him comprehend that such an offering would be an outrage to the respected and rigid Jansenist. He was nearly as absent as the man who forgot in the evening that he had been married in the morning. It occurred to him one day to go and dine with a friend. On his knocking at the door, a servant in mourning informed him that his friend had been buried ten days before, and reminded him that he had himself assisted at the funeral.

The humour and fancy which abound in his tales, and his reputation among the men of genius of his time, made him an object of curiosity. He was sought and shown in company as "a lion," if one may use that ephemeral term. A farmer-general invited a large party "to meet the celebrated La Fontaine." They came prepared to hear him talk like "Joconde," or tell such stories as "The Matron of Ephesus." Poor La Fontaine eat, drank, never opened his mouth for any other purpose, and soon rose, to attend, he said, a

meeting of the academy. "The distance is short: you will be too early," said the host. "I'll take the longest way," replied La Fontaine. Madame de la Sabliere at one time discharged her whole establishment whilst La Fontaine was residing in her house. "What!" said somebody, have you kept none?" "None," replied the lady, "except *mes trois bêtes**,—my cat, my dog, and La Fontaine." Such was her idea of his thoughtless and more than childish simplicity. It will hardly cause surprise that such a man never had a study or a library. He read and wrote when and where he felt disposed; and never thought of being provided with any other books than those he was immediately using.

After twenty years of unwearied kindness, he was deprived of the society and care of his benefactress, and soon after of the home which he had enjoyed in her house. The circumstances present one of the most curious views of French manners and character at the time. Madame de la Sabliere, a married woman, with an independent fortune, lived on terms of civility with her husband, who scarcely merited even this, and maintained with the anacreontic poet, La Fare, that ambiguous but recognised relation of tender friendship, into which no one looked beyond its decorous exterior, and which created neither scandal nor surprise. La Fare, after an attachment of some years, deserted his "friend" for the gaming table and the actress Champmêlè, who turned so many heads in her day. This desertion so preyed upon the mind of madame de la Sabliere that she sought refuge in devotion and a convent. Her husband, a rhyming marquis, who passed his life in writing madrigals upon his frivolous amours, was deserted about the same time by a mistress, and took it so to heart that he poisoned himself — at the romantic age of sixty-five! This event had such an effect upon madame de la Sabliere, joined with her own private sorrows, that she did not long survive him,

* The term "bête" as used here, and familiarly in French conversation is untranslatable into English.

and La Fontaine was once more thrown helpless and homeless upon the world.

The duchess of Bouillon was at this time in England with her sister, the duchess of Mazarin, who had taken up her residence there to avoid breathing the same air with her husband, when tormenting him had ceased to be an amusement to her. The poet St. Evremond, her friend, had, also, been long established in England. Learning the melancholy state in which La Fontaine was left by the death of madame de la Sabliere, the three invited him over to England, with an assurance of being well provided for. Some English persons of distinction, who had known La Fontaine at Paris, and admired his genius, among them lords Godolphin and Danby, and lady Hervey, joined in the invitation. La Fontaine, now infirm and old, and at all times the most indolent of men, could not bring himself to make the effort. He, however, rather hesitated than declined. An opportune present of fifty louis from the duke of Burgundy, or rather in his name, for he was then but a child, decided his refusal.

Notwithstanding this temporary supply, he would soon have been destitute, if he had not become indebted once more for a home and its comforts to the friendship of a woman. Madame d'Hervart, the wife of a rich financier, who had known him at the house of madame de la Sabliere, offered him a similar asylum, in her own. Whilst on her way to make the proposal she met him in the street, and said, without preface or form, "La Fontaine, come and live in my house." "I was just going, madam," said the poet, with as much indifference as if his doing so was the simplest thing in the world; and this relation of kindness and confidence subsisted without change to his death. The protection and proofs of friendship which La Fontaine received from the sex reflect honour upon the memory of his benefactresses. But his is by no means a single instance. An interesting volume might be written upon the obligations which unprotected talents, literature, and

the arts are under to the discerning taste and generosity of Frenchwomen.

La Fontaine's health had been declining for some time; but whether from his having no immediate apprehension of death, or from his habitual indolence, he manifested no sense of the truths and duties of religion. The idea of his dying impenitent agitated the court and the sorbonne. It was arranged that father Poujet, a person of note as a controversialist and director of consciences, should make him a visit, under pretence of mere civility. The abbe Niceron, in his memoirs of men of letters, describes this interview. The wily confessor, after conversing some time on ordinary topics, introduced that of religion with an adroitness wholly superfluous with so simple a soul as La Fontaine. They spoke of the Bible. "La Fontaine," says Niceron, "who was never irreligious in principle, said to him, with his usual naiveté, 'I have been lately reading the New Testament: it is a good book — yes, upon my faith! a very good book; but there is one article to which I cannot subscribe — the eternity of punishment. I do not comprehend how this can be consistent with the goodness of God.' Father Poujet," continues Niceron, "discussed the subject with him fully; and, after ten or twelve visits and discussions, succeeded in convincing La Fontaine of all the truths of religion."

His state soon became so alarming that he was called upon to make a general confession, preparatory to his receiving the sacrament. Certain reparations and expiations were to be previously made; and father Poujet, with all his logic and adroitness, had some difficulty in obtaining them. The first sacrifice required of him was, that he should abandon the proceeds of an edition of his tales, then publishing under his direction in Holland; the publication of them in France having been prohibited since 1677. He readily consented for himself; but wished to make over the profits to the poor, as more consonant with humanity, and more grateful in the eyes of God, than yielding them to a griping rogue

of a Dutch publisher. The priest convinced him that "the wages of sin" could not with propriety be applied to the service of God and of charity. He gave up the point; and such was the satisfaction caused by his conversion at court, that a sum, equal to what he should have received for his tales, was sent to him in the name of the young duke of Burgundy, "who thought it unreasonable that La Fontaine should be the poorer for having done his duty." According to some accounts, this would appear to be the same donation of fifty louis already mentioned; and it is most probable. The devotees of the court were much more likely to reward the conversion than relieve the distress of La Fontaine, at a time when the tone was given by père la Chaise and madame de Maintenon.

He was next required to consign to the flames, with his own hands, a manuscript opera, which he intended to have performed. The sacrifice was not consented to without some qualms of authorship, even by La Fontaine. The last condition was the hardest of all,—that he should ask pardon of God and the church, *publicly*, for having scandalised both in the publication of his tales. La Fontaine, with all his indolence and simplicity, and enfeebled as he was by sickness and age, resisted the demand of a public reparation, in spite of all the arguments and artifices of the confessor. It was agreed between them to appeal to the sorbonne. A deputation of three doctors accordingly waited on La Fontaine, and took part, as might be anticipated, with the confessor. They argued and disputed, but the poet still held out against making satisfaction publicly. An old nurse, who attended him, seeing the pitiless zeal with which they fatigued and teased the poor poet, said to them. "Don't torment him, my reverend fathers; it is not ill-will in him, but stupidity, poor soul; and God Almighty will not have the heart to damn him for it." They, however, did persevere, and gained their point. A deputation from the academy was called in to witness La Fontaine's public reparation,

given as follows by Niceron: — "It is but too public and notorious that I have had the misfortune to compose a book of infamous tales. In composing it I had no idea of the work being so pernicious as it proves to be. My eyes have been opened, and I confess that it is an abominable book: I am most sorry that I ever wrote and published it; and I ask pardon of God and the church for having done so. I wish the work had never proceeded from my pen, and it were in my power wholly to suppress it. I promise solemnly, in the presence of my God, whom, though unworthy, I am going to receive, that I will never contribute to the impression or circulation of it: and I renounce, now and for ever, all profit from an edition which I unfortunately consented should be given in Holland."

There appears no reasonable doubt of a public reparation of some sort having been made by La Fontaine; but that above cited differs so entirely from his turn of thought and style as to suggest a suspicion of its having been fabricated or dictated to him. The report of his death was circulated with that of his conversion; and Liniere, a satirical poet of the day, wrote the following epigram upon him and Pelisson, who had died shortly before: —

> "Je ne jugerai de ma vie
> D'un homme avant qu'il soit eteint, —
> Pelisson est mort en impie,
> Et La Fontaine comme un saint."

There was, however, nothing very surprising either in Pelisson dying like a sinner, or La Fontaine like a saint. The former, from being a huguenot, became a convert, and a maker of converts, a pensioned abbe, a courtier, an author of "Prayers at Mass," "Amatory Verses to Olympia," "a Treatise on the Eucharist;" there was nothing extraordinary or inconsistent in such a man dying, as he did, "unsacramented." It was equally within the range of probability that La Fontaine, never an infidel, always tractable and simple, and now beset on his bed of sickness by learned and skilful disputants, should make so devout and edifying an end.

It should not be omitted that his conversion made the fortune of father Poujet: he immediately became a fashionable confessor, or spiritual director, and obtained church preferment.

The epigrammatist was mistaken in La Fontaine's death. He lived about two years more, in the house of madame d'Hervart; and, in spite of his vow, is supposed to have written some more tales; among them the tale entitled "La Clochette." This relapse is said to be alluded to in the prologue cited by Moreri:—

> "O combien l'homme est inconstant, divers,
> Foible, leger, tenant mal sa parole:
> J'aurais jurè-même, en assez beaux vers,
> De renoncer à tout conte frivole,
> Et quand jurè—c'est ce qui me confond—
> Depuis deux jours j'ai fait cette promesse,—
> Puis fiez vous à rimeur qui repond
> D'un seul moment," &c.

His mind, however, seems to have been deeply tinged with devotion, from his illness, in 1693, to his death, in 1695. He began to translate the church hymns; and read, at the first meeting of the academy which he attended after his illness, a translation of the "Dies Iræ," with more advantage to his reputation as a catholic than as a poet. His talent seems now to have given way to age, infirmity, and the penances which he appears to have imposed upon himself.

Lulli, who died a few years before, did public penance, like La Fontaine, but with an after-thought worthy of the cunning Florentine. He burned, at the request of his confessor, the music of a new unperformed opera. A prince having asked him, a few days after, how he could be so silly as to destroy charming music at the desire of a drivelling jansenist, he replied, "Hush, hush, monseigneur; I knew what I did; I have another copy." He, however, had a relapse, did penance in sackcloth and ashes, and died, with a halter round his neck, singing the hymn, "Sinner, thou must die," with tears of remorse and agony.

La Fontaine died in 1695, and in the seventy-fourth year of his age. Upon undressing his body, after death,

it was found that he mortified himself in a shirt of sackcloth. The apartment in which he lived and died, at the house of madame d'Hervart, was visited as an interesting object for several years after.

The chief fault of La Fontaine is that he had but one tone. Madame de Sévigné, who judged men of genius with the presumption of a court lady dictating to her coterie, pronounces him wretched when he is anything but a fabulist. "I should like," said she, in one her letters, "to attempt a fable, for the express purpose of showing La Fontaine the misery of forcing one's talent out of its sphere; and what bad music is produced by the foolish wish to sing in every tone."

La Fontaine had one tone in which he was pre-eminent; but sang in more than one without producing bad music. The poem of "Adonis" has great beauty. It should be regarded, he says, only as an idyl; and it will, undoubtedly, be found one of the most beautiful of that class. But it had the further merit of being the first accomplished specimen of heroic verse in France; for Boileau had not yet given his "Lutrin." The mythological tale of "Psyche and Cupid," in which prose and verse alternate and relieve each other, continues to be read, notwithstanding the modern unpopularity of the divinities of the Pantheon. He is indebted to Apuleius, but only for the fable and main incident: the episodes, description, and manner of narrating ("*manière de conter*," as he calls it), are his own. The celebrated and forgotten romance of "Astrea" was one of the books which La Fontaine read with pleasure; and he is said to have derived from it that tone of pastoral sentiment and imagery which is one of the charms of "Psyche" and of some of his other pieces. It is probable, however, that he is under lighter obligations both to Apuleius and the "Astrea" than to the duchess of Bouillon, to whom he dedicated his tale. Living at the time in her intimate society, it was composed by him, under her inspiration, in that style of gaiety, tenderness, gallantry, and refinement, which he has combined with

so much of simplicity and fancy. The faults of this mythological, or, according to some, allegorical tale, as it is treated by La Fontaine, are its description of Versailles, some fatiguing digressions, and a certain indolent voluptuary languor. The result is, occasionally, that most fatal of all wants — the want of interest.

La Fontaine's dramatic pieces have a manifest affinity to his genius, but none whatever to the genius of the drama. Some of his elegies, compliments, anacreontics, and other lesser pieces, are worthy of him; others so indifferent as to render their genuineness doubtful. His poem on St. Malch was approved by the lyric poet Rousseau; and this is its highest distinction. His poem on Jesuit's Bark is universally condemned.

It is only in his fables and tales that one is to look for the supremacy of La Fontaine. As a fabulist he has surpassed all who preceded him, and has never been approached by his successors. It is charged upon him that he invented nothing; that he but translated, imitated, or versified Æsop, Phædrus, Petronius, Rabelais, Boccaccio, Ariosto, Machiavelli, the hundred novels of Cinthio, the Heptameron of the queen of Navarre, &c.; but it is justly replied, that this proceeded only from his humble estimate of himself, joined with his indolence. "His considering himself," says Fontenelle, "inferior to Æsop and Phædrus was only another instance of his anomalous stupidity." "It is untrue," says La Harpe, "that La Fontaine invented nothing; he invented his style." The question could not be placed in a happier and truer light. La Fontaine, from humility and indolence, took the materials which others had supplied to his hand; but by his manner of using them, by the magic of his original and unrivalled style, made them his own. So complete is his mastery over them, and so entirely is the merit his, that the palpable difference, in the original, between the genuine tales of Æsop and the forgeries of the Greek monk Planudes, vanish beneath his touch.

France has produced a host of writers of fables and

apologues since his time, but none worthy of being named with him. England has produced much fewer fabulists, yet is justly proud of Gay. He had a striking resemblance to La Fontaine in personal character. Pope's verse, in the epitaph on him,

"In wit a man, simplicity a child,"

would seem to have been expressly written for La Fontaine. As poets or fabulists they differ widely and essentially. Gay's fables are the nearest in merit; but, instead of resemblance, they present the opposition of wit, satire, and party spirit, in a neat and pointed style, to La Fontaine's universal and ingenious moral, picturesque simplicity, and easy graceful negligence.

An anonymous volume of English fables, imitated from La Fontaine, appeared in 1820. It is attributed to a practised and distinguished writer both in prose and verse*; and might pass for a most successful version, if the original were not directly and unluckily contrasted with it in the opposite page. The reader will be more informed by comparing a short extract from each than by pages of dissertation.

"He! bon jour, monsieur du Corbeau:
Que vous êtes joli! que vous me semblez beau!
Sans mentir, si votre ramage,
Se rapporte à votre plumage,
Vous êtes le phœnix des hotes de ces bois."

"When thus he began: 'Ah! sir Ralph, a good morning:
How charming you look! *how tasteful your dress!*
Those bright glossy plumes, your *fine person adorning,*
Produce an effect which I cannot express.
Colours glaring and gaudy were never my choice;
When I view them *disgust is my only sensation;*
If you join to that plumage a mellow-toned voice,
You 're the phœnix, I vow, of the feathered creation.'"

This citation is made, not to censure the English version, but to prove the unattainable charm of La Fontaine's manner,—that manner or style which he invented; his close adherence to truth and nature; the art with which he veils the wildest improbabilities under a probable, consistent, or humorous air; his power of combining levity of tone with depth of ob-

* Mr. Croker.

servation, and the utmost simplicity with the utmost finesse. It is known that La Fontaine observed the characters, habits, attitudes, and expression of the brute creation with a view to his fables. Whilst he endows his brute heroes with speech and thought, one never loses the image of their kind;—whilst the flatterer gulls his dupe, and even when he concludes with giving him the moral by way of compensation, one never loses sight of the fox and raven: but under the touch of the translator, and indeed of all other fabulists but La Fontaine, they receive the human form with the human attributes.

La Fontaine's fables are reputed perfect in every sense, poetical and moral. Two faults are imputed to his tales; the one venial and even questionable, the other most serious, and past all doubt. His narration, it is said, is sometimes careless and diffuse. This has offended the fastidious technical taste of some of his countrymen; but to others his easy, indolent, copious, rambling effusion is an additional charm. The second fault of his tales, their licentiousness, is unpardonable. He imbibed it, most probably, from the perusal and imitation of Rabelais, Clement Marot, Boccaccio, and Ariosto, and confounded it with their gaiety. But, in adopting the freedom of their pleasantries, he has discarded their grossness. His indecorous allusions are conveyed with infinite finesse and ingenuity of expression, and he must be acquitted of all intention to corrupt — of the consciousness even of a corrupting tendency. No inference unfavourable to him is to be drawn from their condemnation and prohibition at the request of the sorbonne. The sin of his tales, and that which he was called on to expiate, was not their immorality, but the liberties which, like his models, he took occasionally with monks, nuns, and confessors. It is but justice to him to state his own vindication. He urged the example of the ancients; and the necessity of a certain tone of gaiety and freedom in familiar tales, without which they would want their essential grace

and charm. "He who would reduce," says he, "Ariosto and Boccaccio to the modesty of Virgil would assuredly not be thanked for his pains—(*ne ferait assurement rien qui vaille*"). An enervating tender melancholy is, he says, much more injurious. His only object, he protests, was to procure the reader a passing smile; and, for his part, he could not comprehend how the reading of his tales should have a bad effect upon others when the composition had none upon him."

But can it be true, or possible, that this enchanting fabulist was not merely subject to absences and musings, but the dullest of mortals in conversation;—his thoughts and expressions alike clumsy and confused? Two, the most positive testimonies, will suffice, out of many. The daughter of Racine, who had seen him frequently at her father's table, described him as "slovenly, stupid, and talking of nothing but Plato." La Bruyère obviously meant the following character for him:—"A man appears — clumsy, heavy, stupid. He cannot talk, or even tell what he has just seen. If he sits down to write, he produces the model of tales. He endows with speech brutes, trees, stones, — all to which nature has denied speech; and all is levity, elegance, beauty, nature, in his works." * These testimonies, though so positive, are far from conclusive. The lady had no taste for Plato, and La Bruyère's style of portraiture, always overcharged, seems particularly so in this instance, where his object was contrast and effect. La Fontaine may have fallen into reveries and solecisms in the company of his friends; he may have been silent and dull at the table of a financier, where he was among strangers to be stared at; but his society would not have been sought and prized, not only by the Molières, Boileaus, and Racines, but by the Condés, Contis, and

* Un homme paraît — grossier, lourd, stupide. Il ne sçait pas parler, ni raconter ce qu'il vient de voir. S'il se met à écrire, c'est le modèle des beaux contes. Il fait parler les animaux, les arbres, les pierres,—tout ce qui ne parle pas. Ce n'est que légèreté, que élégance, que beau naturel, dans ses ouvrages.

Villars, and in the distinguished circles of mesdames de Bouillon, Mazarin, and La Sabliere were the charm of his writings wholly wanting in his conversation. His writings would have been admired, and their author neglected, as in the case of Corneille, were his conversation equally common-place and uninteresting. La Fontaine probably was dull to those who neither understood nor were understood by him. He was La Fontaine, the charming fabulist, only when the subjects and the society interested him; and those around him could, by mutual intelligence, bring his genius into play. Goldsmith, in the same manner, was depreciated by persons who did not understand him. Topham Beauclerk, a man of wit and fashion about town, thought his conversation absurd and dull; but Edmund Burke found in it the poet and observer of mankind. The admiration of Horace and Varus, and the society of Mæcenas and Augustus, did not protect Virgil's simplicity of character from being sneered at by the court satirists and *petits-maîtres* of his time. The well-known description of him by Horace is not without resemblance to La Fontaine's character.

La Fontaine was buried in the cemetery of St. Joseph, at Paris, by the side of Moliere, who had died many years before. Boileau and Racine survived him: His best epitaph is the following, written by himself: it records his character with equal fidelity and humour.

"Jean s'en alla comme il était venu,
Mangant son fonds aprez son revenu,
Croyant le bien chose peu nécessaire.
Quant à son temps bien le sçut depenser,
Deux parts en fit dont il soluoit passer—
L'une à dormir, et l'autre à ne rieu faire."

PASCAL.

1623 — 1662.

Bayle commences his life of Pascal, by declaring him to be one of the sublimest geniuses that the world ever produced; and every word we read confirms this judgment. He was as singular as he was great. He is, perhaps, the only instance of a man born with a natural genius for the exact sciences, who applied the subtlety and acuteness of his understanding to religious subjects, combining with close logical reasoning the utmost elegance and purity of style, and crowning all with so severe an adherence to what he considered the duties of a christian as materially shortened his days. His life reads as one miracle: our admiration is perpetually excited,—may we own it? — our pity also. It is hard to say whether this be a just feeling. When we read of the simplicity and singleness of his character, of his sublime powers of self-denial, of his charity, his humility, and his patience, we feel that he as nearly approached his divine Master, as any man on record has ever done. But when we reflect on divine goodness, on the mission of the Redeemer, on the blessings with which God has gifted us — we cannot believe that we are sent here for the mere purpose of mortifying all our natural inclinations, or of spending our whole thoughts in preparation for a future life, except as virtue and piety are preparations. Man was born to be happy through the affections — to enjoy the beauty and harmony of the visible creation — to find delight in the exercise of his faculties, and the fulfilment of his social duties; and when to this is added a spirit of pious resignation, and a wish to be acceptable to God — we may rest satisfied: this state of mind not being so

easy to attain, and not exaggerate our duties, till life becomes the prison and burden that Pascal represents it to be. Still it is with reverence that we venture to criticise a virtue that transcends the common nature of man. Pascal stands an example of the catholic principles of morality, and shows the extent to which self-denial can be carried by an upholder of that faith. Added to this, is the interest we take in the history of one who, from his birth, gave token of talents of a very uncommon order. The wonders recorded of his childhood are too well authenticated to admit of a doubt, while certainly they are not exceeded by any other prodigy, the achievements of whose premature genius have been handed down.

The family of Pascal was of Auvergne: it had been ennobled by Louis XI. in 1478, in the person of a *maître des requêtes;* and, since that epoch, various members of it had filled distinguished situations in Auvergne, and were respected for their virtues as much as for their birth. Etienne Pascal was first president to the court of aids of Clermont-Ferrand. He married a lady named Antoinette Bégon; of the four children born to him by her, three survived — two were daughters: the son, Blaise, was born at Clermont on the 19th of June, 1623. Etienne was left a widower while his children were yet infants; and from that time

1626. he devoted himself to their education. The extraordi-
Ætat. nary and premature talents of Blaise soon displayed
3. themselves. From the moment he could speak, his repartees excited admiration, and still more, his eager questionings on the causes of all things, which displayed acuteness as well as curiosity. His excellent father, perceiving these early marks of talent, was eager to dedicate his whole time to his education, so that he resolved to be his only master in the learned languages

1631. and the sciences. He accordingly gave up his public
Ætat. situation to his brother, and removed to Paris. His
9. daughters shared his paternal cares; he taught them Latin, and caused them to apply themselves to the

acquirement of knowledge; believing that, by inciting them to bestow their attention early on subjects worthy their inquiry, he should develope their talents, and give them habits of intellectual industry, which he considered equally desirable in woman as man. With all this, he had no idea of making a prodigy of his son, or developing his talents prematurely. On the contrary, it was his maxim to keep the boy above his work; and he did not teach him Latin till he was twelve years old. But, while he refrained from exercising his memory by the routine of lessons, he enlarged his mind by conversation; and taught him the meaning and aim of grammar before he placed a grammar in his hands. This was a safe proceeding with a boy of Pascal's eminent capacity — it had probably rendered one less gifted indolent and forgetful.

The world at this time, awakening from a long state of barbarism, was seized by a sort of idolatry and hunger for knowledge, and learning was the fashion of the day. Men of talent devoted their whole lives to science, with an abnegation of every other pursuit unknown in the present age, and were honoured by the great and followed by their disciples with a reverence merited by their enthusiasm and diligence, as well as by the benefits they conferred on their fellow creatures, in enlarging their sphere of knowledge, and bringing from the chaos of ignorance, truth, or the image of truth, to the light of day. Descartes was one of the most celebrated of the Frenchmen of genius of that time. He was not content with being the most eminent mathematician of his age, but he combined a system of philosophy, which, though false, obtained vogue, and secured to him a greater temporary reputation than if he had merely enounced truths, independent of the magic of a theory. The war of his partisans and their antagonists spread his fame: geometry and mathematics obtained more attention than they had ever done; and discoveries were made that excited the ambition of every fresh student to penetrate further than his prede-

cessors into the secrets of the system of the universe. Etienne Pascal found men in Paris, with whom he allied himself in friendship, deeply versed in physics and mathematics, and he also applied himself to these sciences. He associated with Roberval, Carcavi, Le Pailleur, and other scientific men of high reputation — they met at each other's house, and discussed the objects of their labours; they detailed their new observations and discoveries; they read the letters received from other learned men, either foreigners, or residing in the provinces: the ambition of their lives was centred in the progress of science; and the enthusiasm and eagerness with which they prosecuted their researches gave an interest to their conversations that awoke to intensity the curiosity of Pascal's almost infant son. Adding youthful fervour to abilities already competent to the formation of scientific combinations and accuracy, the young Blaise desired to make discoveries himself in causes and effects. A common phenomenon in sound obtained his earliest attention. He observed that a plate, if struck by a knife, gave forth a ringing sound, which he stilled
1635. by putting his hand on the plate. At the age of twelve
Ætat. he wrote a little treatise to account for this phenomenon,
12. which was argued with acuteness and precision. His father wished, however, to turn his mind from the pursuits of science, considering the study of languages as better suited to his age; and he resolved that the boy should no longer be present at the philosophical meetings. Blaise was in despair: to console him, he was told that he should be taught geometry when he had acquired Latin and Greek: he asked, eagerly, what geometry was? His father informed him, generally, that it was the science which teaches the method of making exact figures, and of finding out the proportions between them. He commanded him at the same time neither to speak nor think on the subject more. But Blaise was too inquiring and too earnest to submit to this rule. He spent every moment of leisure in meditation upon the properties of mathematical figures. He drew triangles and

circles with charcoal on the walls of his playroom, giving them such names as occurred to him as proper, and thus began to teach himself geometry, seeking to discover, without previous instruction, all the combinations of lines and curves, making definitions and axioms for himself, and then proceeding to demonstration: and thus, alone and untaught, he compared the properties of figures and the relative position of lines with mathematical precision.

One day his father came by chance into the room, and found his son busy drawing triangles, parallelograms, and circles: the boy was so intent on his work that he did not hear his father enter; and the latter observed him for some time in silence: when at last he spoke, Blaise felt a sort of terror at being discovered at this forbidden occupation, which equalled his father's wonder at perceiving the objects of his attention. But the surprise of the latter increased, when, asking him what he was about, Blaise explained in language invented by himself, but which showed that he was employed in solving the thirty-second proposition of Euclid. His father asked him, how he came to think of such a question: Blaise replied, that it arose from another he had proposed to himself; and so going back step by step as to the figures that had excited his inquiry, he showed that he had established a chain of propositions deduced from axioms and definitions of his own adoption, which conducted him to the proposition in question (that the three angles of every possible triangle are equal to two right angles). The father was struck almost with fear at this exhibition of inborn genius; and, without speaking to the boy, hurried off to his intimate friend M. le Pailleur; but when he reached his house he was unable to utter a single word, and he stood with tears in his eyes, till his friend, fancying some misfortune had occurred, questioned him anxiously, and at length the happy parent found tongue to declare that he wept for joy, not sorrow. M. le Pailleur was not less astonished

when the circumstances narrated were explained to him, and of course advised the father to give every facility for the acquirement of knowledge to one so richly gifted by nature. Euclid, accordingly, was put into the boy's hands as an amusement for his leisure hours. Blaise went through it by himself, and understood it without any explanation from others.* From this time he was allowed to be present at all the scientific meetings, and was behind none of the learned men present in bringing new discoveries and solutions, and in enouncing satisfactory explanations of any doubtful and knotty point. Truth was the passion of his soul; and, added to this, was a love of the positive, and a perception of it, which in the exact sciences led to the most useful results. At the age of sixteen he wrote an "Essay on Conic Sections," which was regarded as a work that would bestow reputation on an accomplished mathematician; so that Descartes, when he saw it, was inclined rather to believe that Pascal, the father, had written it himself, and passed it off as his son's, than that a mere child should have shown himself capable of such strength and accuracy of reasoning. The happy father, however, was innocent of any such deceit; and the boy, proceeding to investigate yet more deeply the science of numbers and proportions, soon gave proof that he was fully capable of having written the work in question.

Etienne Pascal was rewarded for all his self-devotion by the genius of his son. His daughters also profited by his care, and became distinguished at once by their mental accomplishments and their personal beauty. A disaster that occurred, which at first disturbed the happiness of the family, tended in the end to establish it, and to bring into greater notice the talents and virtues of the individuals of which it was composed.

1638. The finances of the government being at a low ebb,
Ætat. through mismanagement and long wars, the minister,
15. cardinal de Richelieu, sought to improve them by dimi-

* La Vie de M. Pascal, écrite par Madame Perier, sa sœur.

nishing the rate of interest towards the public creditor. Of course this act excited considerable discontent among holders of public stock; riots ensued, and some men, in consequence, were imprisoned in the Bastile. Among these was a friend of Etienne Pascal, who openly and warmly defended him, while he cast considerable blame on several government functionaries, and in particular the chancellor Seguier. This imprudence endangered his own liberty; he heard that he was threatened with arrest, and to avoid it left Paris, and for several months hid himself in Auvergne. He had many friends however among noble patrons of learning, and the duchess d'Aiguillon, in particular, interested herself in his favour. Richelieu, as is well known, was very fond of theatrical representations, and a tragi-comedy by Scuderi, was got up for his amusement. Jaqueline Pascal, then only fourteen years old, was selected to fill one of the parts: she at first refused, saying that the cardinal gave them too little pleasure for her to try to contribute to his; but the duchess saw hopes for the father's recal in the daughter's exertions, and persuaded Jaqueline to undertake the part. She acted charmingly, and at the end of the piece approached the cardinal, and recited some verses written for the occasion, asserting the innocence of her father, and entreating the cessation of his exile. The cardinal delighted, took her in his arms, and kissing her again and again, said, "Yes, my child, I grant your request; write to your father, that he may safely return." The 1539.
duchess followed up the impression by an eulogium on Ætat.
Pascal, and by introducing Blaise; "He is but sixteen," 16.
she said, "but he is already a great mathematician." Jaqueline saw that the cardinal was favourably inclined; and with ready tact, added, that she had another request to prefer. "Ask what you will, my child," said the minister, "I can refuse you nothing." She begged that her father, on his return, might be permitted personally to thank the cardinal. This also was granted; and the family reaped the benefit. The car-

dinal received the exile graciously; and, two years after, named him intendant of Normandy at Rouen. Etienne removed with his family, in consequence, to that city. He filled the situation for seven years, enjoying the highest reputation for integrity and ability. About the same time, his daughter, Gilberte, formed an advantageous marriage with M. Perier, who had distinguished himself in a commission entrusted to him by the government in Normandy, and who afterwards bought the situation of counsellor to the court of aids of Clermont-Ferrand.

1641. Ætat. 18. Blaise, meanwhile, was absorbed in scientific pursuits. To the acquisition of Latin and Greek was added the study of logic and physics; every moment of his time was occupied—and even during meals the work of study went on. Charmed with the progress his son made, and his apparent facility in learning, the father was blind to the ill-effects that such constant application had on his health: at the age of eighteen, Pascal began to droop; the indisposition he suffered was slight, and he did not permit it to interfere with his studies; but neglected, and indeed increased, it at last entirely disorganised his fragile being. From that hour he never passed a single day free from pain. Repose, taken at intervals, mitigated his sufferings; but when better he eagerly returned to study — and with study illness recurred.

1642. Ætat. 19. His application was of the most arduous and intense description. At the age of nineteen he invented his arithmetical machine, considered one of the most wonderful discoveries yet put into practice. A machine capable of automatic combinations of numbers has always been a desideratum; and Pascal's was sufficiently well arranged to produce exact results—but it was very complex, expensive, and easily put out of order, and therefore of no general utility, though hailed by mathematicians as a most ingenious and successful invention. It cost him intense application, both for the mental combinations required, and the mechanical part of the execution: — his earnest and persevering study,

and the great efforts of attention to which he put his brain, increased his ill health so much that he was obliged for a time to suspend his labours.

Soon after this, a question, involving very important consequences in physics, agitated the scientific world. and the position of the two Pascals was such, that their attention could not fail to be drawn to the consideration of it. The mechanical properties of the atmosphere had previously been inquired into by Galileo, who recognised in it the quality of weight. This philosopher, however, notwithstanding the wonderful sagacity which his numerous physical discoveries evince, failed to perceive that the weight of the atmosphere, combined with its fluidity and elasticity, opposed a definite force to any agent by which the removal of the atmosphere from any space was attempted. This resistance to the production of a vacuum had long been recognised, and was in fact expressed, but not accounted for, by the phrase, "nature's abhorrence of a vacuum." Whatever meaning he may have attached to it, Galileo retained this phrase, but limited its application, in order to embrace the phenomenon, then well known, that suction-pumps would not raise water more than about thirty-five feet high; and although "nature's abhorrence of a vacuum" raises the water thirty-five feet, to fill the space deserted by the air, which had been drawn out by the piston, yet above that height a vacuum still remained; which fact Galileo expressed by saying, that "thirty-five feet was the limit of nature's abhorrence of a vacuum."

That Galileo should have missed a discovery as important as it was obvious, is the more remarkable from the circumstance of its having been actually suggested to him by one of his own pupils. A letter from Baliani to Galileo is extant, dated in 1630, in which the writer says that Galileo, in one of his letters to him, having taught him that air has sensible weight, and shown him how that weight might be measured, he argued from thence that the force necessary to produce a vacuum,

was nothing more than the force necessary to remove the weight of the mass of atmosphere which presses round every object, just as water would press on any thing at the bottom of the sea.*

Torricelli, the pupil of Galileo, next took up the problem. He argued, that if the weight of the atmosphere were the direct agent by which the column of water is sustained in a pump, the same agent must needs exert the same amount of force in sustaining a column of any other liquid; and, therefore, that if a heavier liquid were used, the column sustained would be less in height exactly in the same proportion as the weight of the liquid forming the column was greater. Mercury, the heaviest known liquid, appeared the fittest for this purpose. The experiment was eminently successful. The weight, bulk for bulk, of mercury was fourteen times greater than that of water; and it was found that, instead of a column of thirty-five feet being supported, the column was only thirty inches, the latter being exactly the fourteenth part of thirty-five feet.

Various ways of further testing the evident inferences to be drawn from this beautiful experiment, were so obvious, that it is impossible to suppose the illustrious philosopher to whom we are indebted for it, would not have pursued the inquiry further, had not death, almost immediately after this, prematurely removed him. The experiment became known, and excited much interest in every part of Europe; and Mersenne, who had an extensive scientific correspondence, having received an account of Torricelli's investigation, communicated the particulars to Pascal. Always reluctant to surrender long established maxims, the philosophers of that day rejected the solution of the problem given by Torricelli, and still clung to the maxim that "nature abhors a vacuum." The sagacity of Pascal, however, could not be so enslaved by received notions; and he accordingly, assisted by M. Petit, applied himself to the discovery of some experimental test, of a nature so unanswerable

* Life of Galileo, by Drinkwater, p. 90, 91.

as to set the question at rest. The result was the celebrated experiment on the Puy de Dôme, the first and most beautiful example of an "experimentum crucis" recorded in the history of physics.

Pascal argued, that if the weight of the incumbent atmosphere were the real agent which sustained the mercury in Torricelli's tube, as it was inferred to be by that philosopher, any thing which would diminish that weight, ought to diminish in the same proportion the height of the mercurial column. To test this, he first conceived the idea of producing over the surface of the mercury in the cistern in which the end of the tube was immersed, a partial vacuum, so as to diminish the pressure of the air upon it. But, apprehending that this experiment would hardly be sufficiently glaring to overcome the prejudices of the scientific world, he proposed to carry the tube containing the mercurial column upwards in the atmosphere, so as gradually to leave more and more of the incumbent weight below it, and to ascertain whether the diminution of the column would be equal to the weight of the air which it had surmounted. No sufficient height being attainable in Paris, the experiment was conducted, under Pascal's direction, by his brother-in-law, M. Perier, at Clermont, on the Puy de Dôme, a hill of considerable height, near that place. The experiment was completely successful. The mercurial column gradually fell until the tube arrived at the summit, and as gradually rose again in descending. Bigotry and prejudice could not withstand the force of this, and immediately gave way. The maxim of nature's abhorrence of a vacuum was henceforth expunged from the code of natural science; and, what was still more conducive to the advancement of all true science, philosophers were taught how much more potent agents of discovery, observation and experiment, guided by reason, are, than the vain speculations in which the ancients had indulged, and from the baneful influence of which scientific inquirers had not yet been emancipated.

1647. Pascal had hardly escaped from boyhood at this
Ætat. time; his invention, his patience, the admirable system
24. he pursued of causing all his opinions to be supported
by facts and actual experiment, deserved the highest
praise and honour. It is mortifying to have to record
that his discovery was disputed. The jesuits accused
him of plagiarism from the Italians; and Descartes declared, that he had first discovered the effects produced by
the weight of the atmosphere, and suggested to Pascal the
1651. experiment made on the Puy de Dôme. Pascal treated
Ætat. these attacks with the contempt which his innocence
28. taught him that they deserved; and published an account
of his experiments without making the slightest allusion
to them. Descartes was a man of eminent genius — his industry and penetration often led him to make the happiest conjectures; but, more intent on employing his bold and often fortunate imagination in the fabrication of ingenious theories than on applying himself with patience and perseverance to the discovering the secrets of nature, he sometimes threw out a happy idea, which he did not take the pains to establish as a truth and a law. The honour of invention is due to those who seize the scattered threads of knowledge which former discoverers have left, and weave it into a continuous and irrefragable web. Pascal followed up his experiments with the
1653. utmost hesitation and care, only deciding when de-
Ætat. cision became self-evident. Two Treatises, one "On
30. the Equilibrium of Liquids," another "On the Weight
of the Atmosphere," which he subsequently wrote, though they were not published till after his death, display his admirable powers of observation, and the patient zeal with which he followed up his discoveries. At the time that he wrote these treatises he was engaged on others, on geometrical subjects: he did not publish them; and some have been irrecoverably lost. Every subject then interesting to men of science employed his active mind. His name had become well known: he was consulted by all the philosophers and mathematicians of the day, who proposed questions to him; and his

thoughts were sedulously dedicated to the solution of the most difficult problems. But a change meanwhile had come over his mind, and he began to turn his thoughts to other subjects, and to resolve to quit his mathematical pursuits, and to dedicate himself wholly to the practice and study of religion.

This was no sudden resolve on his part — piety had always deep root in his heart. He had never, in the most inquisitive days of his youth, applied his eager questionings and doubts to matters of faith. His father had carefully instilled principles of belief; and gave him for a maxim, that the objects of faith are not the objects of reason, much less the subject of it. This principle became deeply engraven in his heart. Logical and penetrating as his mind was, with an understanding open to conjecture with regard to natural causes, he never applied the arts of reasoning to the principles of christianity, but was as submissive as a child to all the dicta of the church. But though the so to call it metaphysical part of religion was admitted without a doubt or a question, its moral truths met with an attention — always lively, and at last wholly absorbing; so that he spent the latter portion of his life in meditating, day and night, the law of God.

This change began first to operate at the age of four-and-twenty. His zeal overflowed to, and was imbibed by, all near him. His father was not ashamed to listen to his son's exhortations, and to regulate his life hereafter by severer rules. His unmarried sister, Jaqueline — the heroine of the tale previously narrated, who possessed singular talents — listened to her brother with still greater docility and effect: an effect rather to be deplored than rejoiced in, since it caused her to renounce the cultivation of her talents, and the exercise of active duties, and to dedicate herself to the ascetic practices of catholicism.

Meanwhile the health of Pascal suffered severer attacks, and his frail body wasted away; so that before he attained the prime of life he fell into the physical debility of age. He resided at this time in Paris, with

his father and his sister Jaqueline. To benefit his health, he was recommended to suspend his labours, to enjoy the recreations of society, and to take more exercise: accordingly, he made several tours in Auvergne and
1651. other provinces. The death of his father broke up the
Ætat. little family circle. Jaqueline Pascal had long entertained
28. the desire of becoming a nun: on the death of her father she put her resolve in execution, and took the vows in the abbey of Port Royal aux Champs. The other sister re-
1653. sided with her husband at Clermont. Pascal, left to him-
Ætat. self, devoted his time more earnestly than ever to studious
30. pursuits, till the powers of nature failed; and he was forced, through utter inability, to abandon his studies. He took gentle exercise, and frequented society. Though serious even to melancholy, his conversation pleased by the depth of understanding and great knowledge that it displayed. Pascal himself felt the softening influence of sympathy: he began to take pleasure in society —he even contemplated marrying. Happy had it been for him if this healthy and sound view of human duties had continued: but an accident happened which confirmed him as a visionary — if we may apply that term to a man who in the very excess of religious zeal preserved the entire use of his profound arts of reasoning, and an absolute command over his will: yet when the circumstances of his exclusive dedication of himself to pious exercises are known, and we find that a vision forms one of them, that word cannot be considered unjust — nor is it possible to help lamenting that his admirable understanding had not carried him one step further, and taught him that asceticism has no real foundation in the beneficent plan of the Creator.

1654. One day, in the month of October, he was taking
Ætat. an airing in a carriage-and-four towards the Pont de
31. Neuilli, when the leaders took the bit in their teeth, at a spot where there is no parapet, and precipitated themselves into the Seine: fortunately the shock broke the traces, and the carriage remained on the brink of the precipice. Pascal, a feeble, half-paralytic, trembling

being, was overwhelmed by the shock. He fell into a succession of fainting fits, followed by a nervous agitation that prevented sleep, and brought on a state resembling delirium. In this he experienced a sort of vision, or extatic trance; in commemoration of which he wrote a singular sort of memorandum, which, though incoherent to us, doubtless brought to his memory the circumstances of his vision. This paper he always kept sewn up in his dress. The effect of the circumstance was to make him look on his accident as a call from Heaven to give in all worldly thoughts, and to devote himself to God. The pious exhortations of his sister, the nun, had before given him some notion of such a course; and he determined to renounce the world, and to dedicate himself exclusively to religious practices.

The account that his sister, madame Perier, gives of the rules of life to which he adhered is most deeply interesting, as appertaining to a man of such transcendent genius; and yet deeply painful, since we cannot see that God could be pleased or served by his cutting himself off from the enjoyment of all the natural and innocent affections, or by a system of self-denial, that undermined his health and shortened his life. To follow up the new rules he had laid down for his conduct, he removed to another part of Paris; and showed so determined a resolve to renounce the world that, at last, the world renounced him. In this retreat he disciplined his life by certain principles, the chief of which was to abstain from all pleasures or superfluity; in accordance with this system, he allowed himself nothing but what was absolutely necessary; he unfurnished his apartment of all carpets and hangings, reserving only a table and chairs, of the coarsest manufacture: he also, as much as possible, denied himself the service of domestics: he made his bed himself; and went to the kitchen to fetch his dinner, and carried it into his own room, and took back the remains when he had finished: in short, his servant merely cooked and went to market for him. His time was otherwise spent in acts of charity, in prayer, and

in reading the scriptures. At first the regularity and quiet of a life of retreat recruited somewhat his shattered frame: but this did not last. His mind could not be idle, nor his reasoning powers remain inactive; and he soon found cause to study as deeply matters connected with religion as before he had applied himself to the investigation of mathematical truths.

The abbey of Port Royal had not many years before been reformed, and acquired a high reputation. M. Arnaud (a noble of Auvergne, and a celebrated advocate,) was the father of a numerous family of children, and among them a daughter, who, at eleven years of age, was named abbess of Port Royal. Instead of following the old track of indulgence and indolence, her young heart became inflamed with pious zeal; and, at the age of seventeen, she undertook the arduous task of reforming the habits and lives of the nuns under her jurisdiction. By degrees she imparted a large portion of her piety to them, and succeeded in her undertaking: watching, fasting, humility, and labour, became the inmates of her convent; and its reputation for sanctity and purity increased daily. The abbey of Port Royal aux Champs was situated at the distance of only six leagues from Paris; the situation in itself was desolate, but some private houses appertained to it. Several men of eminent learning and piety were attracted, by the high reputation that the abbey enjoyed, to take up their abode in one of these dwellings. They fled the world to enjoy christian peace in solitude: but indolence was not a part of their practice. Besides the works of piety of which they were the authors, they received pupils, they compiled books of instruction; and their system of education became celebrated, both for the classical knowledge they imparted, and the sentiments of religion they inspired. Among these reverend and illustrious recluses were numbered two brothers of mother Angelica, the abbess, Arnaud d'Andilli, and Antoine Arnaud, and two of her nephews; in addition may be named Saci, Nicole, and others, well known as French theologians,

and controversialists. Pascal's attention being drawn to this retreat by the circumstance of his sister's having taken her vows in the abbey, he was desirous to become acquainted with men so illustrious: without taking up his abode absolutely among them, he cultivated their society, often paid visits of several weeks' duration to their retreat, and was admitted to their intimacy. They soon discovered and appreciated his transcendent genius, while he was led by them to apply his talents to religious subjects. The vigour and justness of his thoughts inspired them with admiration. Saci was, in particular, his friend; and the famous Arnaud regarded him with wonder for his youth, and esteem for his learning and penetration. These became in the end most useful to the recluses; and from the pen of their young friend they derived, not only their best defence against their enemies, but a glory for their cause, founded on the admirable "Lettres Provinciales," which have survived, for the purity of their style, vigour of expression, and closeness of argument; for their wit, and their sublime eloquence, long after the object for which they were written, is remembered only as casting at once ridicule and disgrace upon the cause of religion in France.

It is indeed a melancholy and degrading picture of human nature, to find men of exalted piety and profound learning, waste their powers on controversies, which can now only be regarded with contempt, though the same sentiment cannot follow the virtues which these men displayed — their constancy, their courage, and noble contempt of all selfish considerations.

The foundation of the dispute, which called forth at once these virtues and this vain exertion of intellect, still subsists between different sects of christianity. The christian religion is founded on the idea of the free will of man, and the belief that he can forsake sin; and that, according as he does forsake or cling to it, he deserves happiness or reprobation in the other world. But to this is added, with some, the belief that sanctification springs from the especial interference of God; that man

cannot even seek salvation without a call; that faith and grace is an immediate and gratuitous gift of God to each individual whom the Holy Ghost inspires with a vocation. How far man was born with the innate power of belief and faith, or how far he needed a particular and immediate gift of grace to seek these from God, divided the christian world into sects at various times, and was the foundation of the dispute between the molinists and jansenists. The first name was derived from Molina, a jesuit, who endeavoured to establish a sort of accord between the Almighty's prescience and man's free will, which gave the latter power to choose, and sufficing grace to choose well. The jesuits were zealous in supporting the doctrine of one of their order. They discussed the points in question with so much acrimony that they laid themselves open to as violent attacks; they were opposed in particular by the dominicans; the dispute was carried on in Rome, before assemblies instituted to decide upon it, but which took care to decide nothing; and the pope ended, by ordering the two parties to live in peace. Meanwhile Cornelius Jansen, bishop of Ypres, wrote a book on saint Augustin, which was not published till after his death: this book, which supported the notion of election by God, was taken up by the adversaries of the jesuits (hereafter called jansenists, the name of the bishop being latinised into Jansenius), and they called attention to it. The jesuits selected five propositions, which they said they found in it, on the subject of grace and election; and these were condemned as heretical. Antoine Arnaud rose as their advocate. The jesuits detested him for his father's sake, who had pleaded the cause of the university of Paris against them, and gained it. Arnaud declared that he had read the work of Jansenius, and could not find the five condemned propositions in it, but acknowledged that, if they were there, they deserved condemnation. The Sorbonne exclaimed against this declaration as "rash;" for, as the pope had condemned these propositions as being enounced by Jan-

senius, of course they were contained in his book.* It was considered necessary that Arnaud should reply to this attack; but, though a learned man, an eloquent writer, and a great theologian, his defence was addressed to the studious rather than the public, and it gained no partisans. It was far otherwise when Pascal took up his pen, and, 1656.
under the name of Louis de Montalte, published his first Ætat.
letter *à un Provincial;* it was written in a popular, yet 33.
clear and conclusive manner, and in a style at once so elegant, perspicuous, and pure, that a child might read and understand, while a scholar would study the pages as a model for imitation. The success of this letter was prodigious: it did not however change the proceedings of the Sorbonne; it assembled—its sittings were crowded with monks and mendicant friars, ignorant men whose opinions were despicable, but whose votes counted. Arnaud's work was condemned, and he himself expelled the Sorbonne. This sentence roused Pascal to continue his labours. He wrote another letter, which met with equal approbation; but the success only served to irritate Arnaud's enemies; they obtained another censure of the five propositions from the pope, and insisted on all suspected persons signing a formula in which they were renounced. The nuns of Port Royal were called on to put their names, and, on their resistance, they were threatened with the destruction of their house, and dispersion.

At this moment, a singular circumstance occurred, which to this day is, by many, considered a miracle. A sacred relic, one of the thorns of our Saviour's crown of thorns, had been lately brought to Paris. To a protestant the pretence of the existence of such a relic is ridiculous, but the catholic church has always upheld a belief in the miraculous preservation of these instruments of our Saviour's passion and death. The holy thorn

* Innocent X., in condemning these propositions, did not cite the passages in which they were to be found; and, in fact, they are not quoted with verbal correctness. Voltaire asserts that they are to be found there in spirit; and he cites passages which establish his assertion. *Siècle de Louis* XIV., chap. xxxvii.

was carried to many convents, and among others to Port Royal, and all the inhabitants went in procession, and kissed it. Among them was a niece of Pascal, daughter of madame Perier. She had been long ill of a fistula in an eye: she touched the wound with the relic, and it healed at once.* The news of this miracle was spread abroad; it was believed, and all Paris flocked to the convent. A religious house, the scene of an actual miracle, was considered too highly favoured by God to be persecuted; the nuns and the jansenists triumphed; the jesuits were, for the time, silent and abashed. To add to their defeat, Pascal continued to write his Letters to a Provincial, attacking the society with the arms of wit and eloquence. The jesuitical system of morality, full of mental reservation and ambiguity — its truckling to vice, and contradiction to the simple but sublime principles of the gospel, afforded him a wide field for censure. He wrote not a mere controversial work, interesting to theologians only, but a book addressed to all classes. It gained immediate attention; and its eloquence and beauty have secured its immortality.†

* Madame Perier, in the life she has written of her brother, mentions the miraculous cure of her daughter: "This fistula," she says, "was of so bad a sort, that the cleverest surgeons of Paris considered it incurable. Nevertheless she was cured in a moment by the touch of the holy thorn; and this miracle was so authentic, that it is acknowledged by every body." Racine, in his fragment of a History of the Abbey of Port Royal, details the whole circumstance with elaborate faith in the most miraculous version of it. He says, that such was the simplicity of the nuns, that though the cure took place on the instant, they did not mention the miracle for several days, and some time elapsed before it was spread abroad. Voltaire says, that persons who had known mademoiselle Perier told him that her cure was very long. Still some circumstance must have made it appear short, or so universal a belief in a miracle, sufficient at the time to confound the jesuits, could not have been spread abroad; nor would her uncle, Pascal, the most upright and single-minded of men, have given it the support of his testimony.

† Boileau's admiration for Pascal was unbounded. He declared the "Lettres Provinciales" to be the best work in the French language. Madame de Sévigné, in her letters, narrates a whimsical scene that took place between him and some jesuits. Their conversation turning on literary subjects, Boileau declared that there was only one modern book to be compared to the works of the ancients. Bourdaloue begged him to name it. Boileau evaded the request. "You have read it more than once, I am sure," he said, "but do not ask me its name." The jesuit insisted; and Boileau, at last, taking him by the arm, exclaimed, "You are determined to have it, father; well, it is Pascal." "*Morbleu!* Pascal!" cried Bourdaloue, astonished. "Yes, certainly Pascal is as well written as any thing false can be." "False!" exclaimed Boileau, "False! Know that he is as

The success of this book, the activity of his mind, and his sedulous study of theology, naturally led Pascal to conceive the project of other works. The scope of that which principally engaged his attention was, a refutation of atheists. He meditated continually on this subject, and put down all the thoughts that occurred to his mind. Illness prevented him from giving them subsequently a more connected form, but they exist as his "Pensées," and many of them deserve attention and veneration; while others, founded on exaggerated and false views of human duties, are interesting as displaying the nature of his mind. The acuteness and severity of thought which in early life led him to mathematical discoveries, he now applied to the truths of christianity; and he followed out all the consequences of the doctrine of the church of Rome with an uncompromising and severe spirit. Want of imagination, perhaps, caused his mistakes; for mistakes he certainly made. He is sublime in his charity, in his love and care for the poor, in his gentleness and humility; but when we learn that he, a suffering, dying man, wore a girdle armed with sharp points as a punishment for transient and involuntary emotions of vanity—when we find him reprehending his sister for caressing her children, and denouncing as sinful the most justifiable, and indeed virtuous departure from ascetic discipline, we feel that the mathematical precision with which he treated subjects of morals is totally at war with the system of the Creator. madame Perier relates, that she was often mortified and hurt by his cold manner, and the apparent distaste with which he repulsed her sisterly attentions. She complained to their sister, the nun; but she understood better his motives, and explained how he considered it

true as he is inimitable." On another occasion, a jesuit, father Bouhours, consulted Boileau as to what books he ought to consult as models for style. "There is but one," said Boileau, "read the 'Lettres Provinciales,' and believe me that will suffice." Voltaire pronounces the same opinion: he calls Pascal the greatest satirist of France; and says that Molière's best comedies have not the wit of the first of these Letters, nor had Bossuet written any thing so sublime as the latter ones.

a virtue to love without attaching himself, and also deemed it sin to excite attachment; and proved that notwithstanding his apparent coldness his heart was warm, by mentioning the earnestness with which he served her on any occasion when she needed his assistance. His most active feeling was charity to the poor; he never refused alms, and would borrow money on interest for the sake of bestowing them; and when cautioned that he might ruin himself, replied, that he never found that any one who had property ever died so poor but he had something to leave. It was a hard life to which he condemned himself; a careful avoidance of all attachment — a continual mortification of his senses, and the labour and sadness of perpetual association with the suffering; added to this, he aimed at such a state of abstraction as not to receive pleasure from food; and aware of an emotion of satisfied vanity when consulted by the learned men of the day, he, as has been said, wore a girdle armed with sharp points, which he struck into himself, so to recal his wandering thoughts. A sense of duty—love of God,—perhaps something of pride, kept him up long; but he sunk under it at last. He spent five years in a rigid adherence to all his rules and duties; then his fragile body gave way, and he fell into a series of sufferings so great, that, though existence was prolonged for four years, they were years of perpetual pain.

1658. Ætat. 35. His illness began by violent tooth-ach; he was kept awake night after night: during these painful vigils, his thoughts recurred to the studies of his youth. He revolved in his head problems proposed by the scientific men of the day.

His attention was now chiefly engaged with the solution of various questions in the higher departments of geometry, especially those connected with the properties of cycloids. He succeeded in solving many problems of great difficulty relating to the quadrature and rectification of segments and arcs of cycloids, and the volumes of solids formed by their revolutions round their axes and ordinates. Except so far as they form

part of the history of mathematical science, and illustrate the powers of great minds, such as that of the subject of this memoir, these problems have now lost all their interest. The powerful instruments of investigation supplied by the differential and integral calculus, have reduced their solution to the mere elements of transcendental mathematics. At the epoch when they engaged the attention of Pascal, before the invention of the modern methods, they were questions presenting the most formidable difficulties. To Pascal, however, they were mere matters of mental relaxation, resorted to with a view to divert his attention from his acute bodily sufferings. He entertained, himself, no intention of making them public. It was, however, the wish of several of his companions in religious retirement that they should be made public, were it only to afford a proof that the highest mathematical genius is not incompatible with the deepest and most sincere christian faith. Pascal yielded, and, according to a custom which was then usual, however puerile it may now appear, he, in the first instance, proposed the 1658.
several questions which he solved as subjects for a Ætat.
prize to the scientific world. Many competitors pre- 35.
sented themselves; and others, who, though not competing for the prize, offered partial solutions. Among these were several who have since attained great celebrity, such as Wallis, Huygens, Fermat, and sir Christopher Wren.

The prize, however, was not gained, nor the problems solved. In the beginning of the year 1659, Pascal published his complete solutions of the problems of the cycloid, with some other mathematical tracts. These admirable investigations cannot fail to excite in every mind a deep regret, that a morbid state of moral and religious feeling should ever have diverted Pascal from mathematical and physical research.

Meanwhile his debility and sufferings increased; but he did not, on that account, yield, but held fast by his system of self-denial, practising himself in turning his

thoughts resolutely to another subject when any agreeable sensation was produced, so that he might be true to his resolve to renounce pleasure, while he bore his pains with inconceivable fortitude and patience; yet they were sufficient to interrupt his studies. As the only duty he was capable of performing, he spent his time in visiting churches where any relics were exposed or some solemnity observed; and for this end he had a spiritual almanack, which informed him of the places where there were particular devotions. "And this he did," says his sister, "with so much devotion and simplicity, that those who saw him were surprised at it; which caused men of great virtue and ability to remark, that the grace of God shows itself in great minds by little things, and in common ones by large." Nor did his sufferings interrupt his works of charity, and the services he rendered to the poor. This last duty grew into the passion of his heart. He counselled his sister to consecrate all her time, and that of her children, to the assistance of those in want; he declared this to be the true vocation of christians, and that without an adherence to it there was no salvation. Nor did he consider that the rich performed their duty by contributing only to public charities, but that each person was held to bestow particular and unremitted attention to individual cases. "I love poverty," he wrote down, "because Christ loved it. I love property, because it affords the means of aiding the needy. I keep faith with every one, and wish no ill to those who do ill to me. I endeavour to be true, sincere, and faithful to all men. I have a tenderness of heart for those with whom God has most bound me; and, whether I am alone or in the view of men, I have the thought of God as the aim of all my actions, who will judge them, and to whom they are consecrated." Such were the sentiments of Pascal; and no man ever carried them out with equal humility, patience, zeal, and fortitude. His simplicity and singleness of heart were admirable; all who conversed with him were astounded by his child-like innocence

and purity; he used no tergiversation, no deceit with himself; all was open, submissive, and humble: if he felt himself guilty of a fault, he was eager to repair it: he attached himself to the very letter and inner spirit of the gospel, and obeyed it with all the powers of his nature. His memory was prodigious, yet he never appeared to recollect any offence done to himself; he declared, indeed, that he practised no virtue in this, since he really forgot injuries; yet he allowed that he had so perfect a memory that he never forgot any thing that he wished to remember.

Meanwhile his peace of mind was disturbed by a 1661. fresh persecution of the jansenists, which caused the Ætat. dispersion of the nuns of Port Royal, and proved fatal 38. to his beloved sister. The jesuits rose from the overthrow, caused by the miracle, with redoubled force, and, if possible, redoubled malice; they got the parliament of Provence to condemn the "Lettres Provinciales" to be burned by the common hangman: they insisted that the nuns of Port Royal should sign the formula, and on their refusal they were taken violently from the abbey, and dispersed in various convents. Jaqueline Pascal was at this time sub-prioress; her piety was extreme, her conscience tender. She could not persuade herself of the propriety of signing the formula; but the anticipation of the misery that the unfortunate nuns would endure through their refusal broke her heart: she fell ill, and died, as she called herself, "the first victim of the formula," at the age of thirty-six. Before her profession as a nun, she had displayed great talents; and had even gained the prize for poetry at Rouen, when only fourteen: her sensibility was great; her piety extreme. Pascal loved her more than any other creature in the world; but he betrayed no grief when he heard of her death. "God grant us grace to die like her," he exclaimed; and reproved his sister for the affliction she displayed. It was this question of the signature of the formula that caused his temporary dissension with the recluses of Port Royal. They

wished the nuns to temporise, and to sign the formula, with a reservation; but Pascal saw that the jesuits would not submit to be thus balked, and that they were bent on the destruction of their enemies. Instead therefore of approving the moderation of the jansenists, he said, "You wish to save Port Royal — you may betray the truth, but you cannot save it." He himself became more jansenist than the jansenists themselves; instead of arguing, as M. Arnaud had done, that the five propositions were not to be found in Jansenius's work, he declared that they were in accordance with St. Paul and the fathers; and inferred that the popes were deceived when they condemned them. He accused the recluses of Port Royal of weakness: they defended themselves; and, the dispute becoming known, it was reported that Pascal was converted; for no one could believe, as was the fact, that he was more tenacious of their doctrines than they were themselves. His confessor aided, at first, this mistake, by misconceiving the tendency of some of his expressions on his death bed; and it was not till three years after Pascal's death that the truth became known.

At the time we now mention, the period of his sister's death, his own end was near: decrepid and feeble, his life had become one course of pain, and each day increased his physical sufferings. He became at last so ill as to need the constant attentions of madame Perier. He had given shelter in his house to a poor family, and at this juncture one of the sons had fallen ill of the small-pox. Fearful that, if his sister visited him, she might carry this illness to her children, he consented to remove to her house. But her cares availed nothing; he was attacked by colics, which continued till his death, but which the physicians did not believe to be attended with danger. He bore his sufferings with patience; and, true to his principles, received no attendance with which he could at all dispense; and, unsoftened by pain, he continued to admit the sedulous attentions of his sister with such apparent repulsion and indifference, that she often feared that they were displeasing to him.

Strange that he should see virtue in checking both his own and her sympathy — that diviner portion of our nature which takes us out of ourselves, and turns our most painful and arduous duties into pleasures.* In the same spirit, when his sister lamented his sufferings, he observed, that, on the contrary, he rejoiced in them: he bade her not pity him, for that sickness was the natural state of a Christian; as thus they are, as they always ought to be, suffering sorrow, and the privation of all the blessings of life — exempt from passion, from ambition, and avarice — ever in expectation of death. "Is it not thus," he said, "that a Christian should pass his life?—and is it not a happiness to find one's self in the state in which one ought to place one's self, so that all one need do is to submit humbly and serenely?" Self-denial thus became a passion with this wonderful man; and no doubt he derived pleasure from the excess to which he carried it.

There was one other passion in which he indulged, that was far more laudable. We compassionate his mistake when he looks on the uselessness and helplessness of sickness as a good, but we admire him when we contemplate his sublime charity. In his last hours he lamented that he had not done more for the poor; more wholly devoted time and means to their relief. He made his will, in which he bestowed all that he could, with any justice, leave away from his family;

* He thus expresses his sentiments on individual attachments: "It is unjust to attach one's self, even though one should do it voluntarily and with pleasure: I should deceive those in whom I call forth affection — for I cannot be the end of any one, and possess not that by which they can be satisfied. As I should be culpable if I caused a falsehood to be believed, although I should persuade gently and was believed with pleasure, and hence derive pleasure myself — so am I culpable if I caused myself to be loved, and attracted persons to attach themselves to me. I ought to undeceive those who are ready to give faith to a falsehood in which they ought not to believe, and in the same way teach them that they should not attach themselves to me; for their lives ought to be spent in pleasing God, and seeking him." As if the beneficent Creator would not be pleased in seeing his creatures linked by the bonds of those very affections which he himself has made the law of our lives. One wonders where and how Pascal lived, that he did not discover that the worst crimes and vices of mankind arose from want of attachment: and that hardness of heart, pride, and selfishness, would, in the common run of men, be the consequences of an adherence to his creed.

and as he was forced, through the excess of his sufferings, to accept more of comfort and attention than he thought consonant with virtue, he desired either to be removed to an hospital, where he might die among the poor, or that a sick mendicant should be brought to his house, and receive the same attention as himself. He was with difficulty diverted from these designs, and only gave in in submission to the dictates of his confessor.

He felt himself dying — his pains a little decreased, when a weakness and giddiness of the head succeeded, precursors of death: his physicians did not perceive his imminent danger, and his last days were troubled by their opposition to his wish to take the sacrament. His sister, however, perceived that his illness was greater than was supposed, and prepared for the last hour, which came more suddenly even than she expected.
1662. Ætat. 39. He was one night seized with convulsions, which intermitted only while he roused himself to communicate, and, then recurring, they ended only with his life. He died on the 19th August, 1662, at the age of thirty-nine.

We contemplate the career of this extraordinary man with sentiments of mingled pity and admiration. He certainly wanted a lively imagination, or he would not have seen the necessity of so much mortification and suffering in following the dictates of the gospel. His charity, his fortitude, his resignation, demand our reverence; but the view he took of human duties was distorted and exaggerated: friendship he regarded as unlawful — love as the wages of damnation — marriage as a sin disguised; he saw impurity in maternal caresses, and impiety in every sensation of pleasure which God has scattered as flowers over our thorny path.

A modern writer* has said, that he pities any one who pronounces on the structure and complexion of a great mind, from the comparatively narrow and scanty ma-

* Lockhart, in his Life of Sir Walter Scott, vol. vii.

terials which can, by possibility, have been placed before him; and observes, that modest understandings will rest convinced there remains a world of deeper mysteries, to which the dignity of genius refuses to give utterance. And thus, in all humility, we despair of penetrating the recesses of Pascal's mind, while solving mathematical problems that baffled all Europe; writing works replete with wit and wisdom, close reasoning and suplime eloquence; and the while believing that he pleased the Creator by renouncing all the blessings of life; by spending his time in the adoration of relics, and shortening his life by self-inflicted privation and torture. His works, replete with energy and eloquence as they are, present many of the same difficulties. We have already spoken at large of his "Lettres Provinciales." His "Pensées," or Thoughts, which he wrote on loose scraps of paper, meaning hereafter to collect them in the form of a work, for the conversion of atheists, contain much that is admirable and true, though we may be allowed to object to some of his reflections. He has been praised for the mode in which he enounces the idea, that an atheist plays a losing game*; he had

* The following is Pascal's address to Atheists:—

"I will not certainly make use, to convince you, of the faith by which we ascertain the existence of God, nor of all the other proofs which we possess, since you will not receive them. I will act by your own principles, and I undertake to show you, by the manner in which you daily reason on matters of less consequence, the way in which you ought to reason on this, and the part you ought to take in deciding the important question of the existence of God. You say we are incapable of knowing whether there be a God. Yet either God is, or God is not — there is no medium: towards which side, then, shall we lean? Reason, you say, cannot decide. An infinite gulph separates us. Stake, toss up at this distance: heads or tails — on which will you bet? Your reason does not affirm, nor can your reason deny one or the other.

"Do not blame the falsehood of those who have chosen — you cannot tell whether they are mistaken: No, you say I do not blame the choice they have made, but that they choose at all; he who chooses heads and he who chooses tails are both in the wrong — the right thing is not to make the wager.

"Yes; but the wager must be made. You have no choice — you are embarked; and not to bet that God does exist, is the same as betting that he does not. Which side will you be on? Weigh the gain and loss of taking that, that there is a God. If you win, you win all: if you lose, you lose nothing. Bet then that he does, without hesitation. Yes, you must wager. But perhaps I wager too much. Let us see. Since there is equal risk of gain or loss, even if it were only that you gain two lives for one, it were worth betting; and if you had ten to win, you would be imprudent not to

far better believe, since thus he gains the chance of eternal happiness, while by disbelief he insures eternal damnation. This thought, however, is founded on misapprehension, and a want of knowledge of the human mind. Belief is not a voluntary act — it is the result of conviction; and we have it not in our choice to be convinced. Besides, love of truth is a passion of the human soul; and there are men who, perceiving truth in disbelief, cling to it as tenaciously as a religionist to his creed. The method of convincing infidels by commenting on the beauty of the morality of the gospel, and its necessity for the happiness of man, is far more conclusive. On the excellence of christianity, and the benefits mankind has derived from its propagation, is founded the noblest argument for its truth; and he has urged these eloquently and forcibly in other portions of his work. Pascal, indeed, must always rank among the worthiest upholders of the christian faith; one who taught its lessons in their purity, and only erred by being good overmuch. The same precision and clear-

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risk your life to gain ten, at a game in which there is so much to be lost or won. But here there is an infinite number of lives to gain, with equal risk of losing or winning, and what you stake is so little and of so short duration that it is folly to fear hazarding it on this occasion."

Pascal reasons better in the following article:—

"We must not deceive ourselves, we are as much body as soul, and thus it is that persuasion does not use demonstration only as its instrument. How few things are proved? Proofs only convince the understanding. Habit renders our proofs strong; that persuades the senses, and gains the understanding without an exertion of its own. Who has demonstrated that there will be a to-morrow, or that we shall die? and yet what is more universally believed. Habit, then, persuades us. Habit makes so many Turks and Pagans: it makes trades, soldiers, &c. We ought not, indeed, to begin finding the truth through habit — but we ought to have recourse to it, when once the understanding has discerned the truth, so to imbibe it, and imbue ourselves with a belief which perpetually escapes from us — for to be for ever calling the proofs to mind would be too burdensome. We must acquire an easy belief — which is that of habit; which, without violence, art, or argument, causes us to believe, and inclines all our faculties to faith, so that our soul naturally falls into it. It is not sufficient to believe by force of conviction, if our senses incline us to believe the contrary. We must cause both parts to agree: the understanding through the reason that it has once acknowledged: and the senses, through habit, by not allowing them to incline the other way.

"Those to whom God has given religion as a feeling of the heart are happy and entirely convinced. We can only desire it for those, who have not this by reason, until God impresses it on the heart."

ness of mind that made him a good mathematician led him to excellence in the practice of christian virtues; but it also led an adherence to the letter rather than the spirit, and to the taking up its asceticism in preference to the holier duties which are an integral part of the plan of the creation, and form the most important portion of human life.

MADAME DE SÉVIGNÉ.

1626—1696.

It appears ridiculous to include a woman's name in the list of "Literary and Scientific Men." This blunder must be excused; we could not omit a name so highly honourable to her country as that of madame de Sévigné, in a series of biography whose intent is to give an account of the persons whose genius has adorned the world.

The subject of this memoir herself would have been very much surprised to find her name included in the list of French writers. She had no pretensions to authorship; and the delightful letters which have immortalised her wit, her sense, and the warm affections of her heart, were written without the slightest idea intruding that they would ever be read, except by her to whom they were addressed.

Marie de Rabutin-Chantal was born on the 5th February, 1626. The family of Rabutin was a distinguished one of Burgundy, and Chantal was its elder branch. Her paternal grandmother, Jeanne-Françoise Fremiot, now canonized, was a foundress of a religious institution, called the Sisters of Visitation; which was the cause of a sort of hereditary alliance between her grand-daughter and the sisters of St. Mary, whose houses she was in the habit of visiting in Paris, and during her various journeys. Mademoiselle de Rabutin lost her father in her early infancy. When she was only a year and a half old, the English made a descent upon the isle of Rhé, for the purpose of succouring Rochelle. M. de Chantal put himself at the head of a troop of gentlemen volunteers, and went out to oppose them. The artillery of the enemy's fleet was turned upon them,

and M. de Chantal, together with the greater part of his followers, were left dead on the field. It has been said that he fell by the hand of Cromwell himself. The baron de Chantal was a French noble of the old feudal times; when a cavalier regarded his arms and military services as his greatest glory, and as the origin of his rank and privileges. His daughter has preserved a curious specimen of his independence in his mode of treating great men, and of the impressive concision of his letter writing. When Schomberg was made marshal of France, he wrote to him—

1697. July 22.

"Monseigneur,
"Rank—black beard—intimacy.
"Chantal."

By which few words he conveys his opinion that Schomberg owed his advancement, not to his valour nor military exploits, but to his rank, his having a black beard, like Louis XIII., and his intimacy with that monarch. The mother of mademoiselle de Rabutin was Marie de Coulanges, who was of the class of nobility distinguished in France as of the robe; that is, as being ennobled through their having filled high civil situations of chancellor, judge, &c. She died in 1636, when her daughter was only ten years of age, and the orphan fell under the care of her maternal grandfather, M. de Coulanges (her grandmother, the saint, being too much occupied by her religious duties to attend to her grandchild's welfare and education): he, also, dying the same year, her guardianship devolved on her uncle, Christophe de Coulanges, abbé de Livry. Henceforth he was a father to her.

We know nothing, except by conjecture, of Marie de Rabutin's education and early years. She says that she was educated with her cousin Coulanges, who was several years younger than herself. He is known to us as a gay, witty, convivial man, whose reputation arose from his talent for composing songs and madrigals on the events of the day, written with that airiness and point pe-

culiar to French productions of this sort. He was quick and clever, and the young lady must have enjoyed in him a merry, agreeable companion. She tells us, also, that she was brought up at court; a court ruled over by cardinal de Richelieu, who, though a tyrant, studied and loved letters, was desirous of advancing civilization, and took pleasure in the society of persons of talent, even if they were women. She was always fond of reading. The endless romances of Scuderi were her earliest occupation; but she aspired to knowledge from more serious studies. Under the care of Ménage and Chapelle, who both admired her, she learnt Latin and Italian. She must always have possessed the delicacy and finesse of understanding that distinguish her letters: vivacity that was almost wit; common sense, that regulated and harmonized all, and never left her. She was not, perhaps, what is called beautiful, even on her first entrance into the world, but she was exceedingly pretty; a quantity of light hair, a fair blooming complexion, eyes full of fire, and a person elegant, light, and airy,
1644. rendered her very attractive. She married, at the age
Ætat. of eighteen, Henry, marquis de Sévigné, of an ancient
18. family in Britany.

The Bretons even now scarcely consider themselves French. They are a race remarkable for dauntless courage and inviolable fidelity; for rectitude and independence of feeling, joined to a romantic loyalty, which, in latter years, has caused them to have a distinguished place in the internal history of France. M. de Sévigné was not quite a man fitted to secure the felicity of a young girl, full of ability, warmth of heart, and excellent sense. He was fond of pleasure, extravagant in his expenses, heedless, and gay. In the first instance, however, the marriage was a happy one. The *bon temps de la regence* were, probably, the *bon temps* of
1647. madame de Sévigné's life. She bore two children, a
Ætat. son and a daughter. Her letters at this period are full
21. of gaiety: there is no trace of any misfortune, nor any sorrow.

M. de Sévigné was related to the celebrated cardinal de Retz, in those days coadjutor to the archbishop of Paris. When France became distracted by civil broils, this connection caused him to adhere to the party of the Fronde. His wife partook in his politics, and was a zealous Frondeuse. We have traces in all her after life of the intimacies formed during the vicissitudes of these troubles. She continued warmly attached to the ambitious turbulent coadjutor, whose last years were spent so differently from his early ones, and on whom she lavishes many encomiums: she was intimate with mademoiselle de Montpensier, daughter of Gaston, duke of Orleans; but her chief friend was the duchess de Chatillon, whom she called her sister. Several letters 1649.
that passed between her and her cousin Bussy-Rabutin, Ætat.
during the blockade of Paris by the prince de Condé, are 23.
preserved. He sided with the court, and wrote to ask his cousin to interfere to obtain for him his carriage and horses, left behind in Paris when the court escaped to St. Germain:—"Pray exert yourself," he writes: "it is as much your affair as mine; as we shall judge, by your success in this enterprise, in what consideration you are held by your party; that is to say, we shall have a good opinion of your generals, if they pay the attention they ought to your recommendation." She failed; and Bussy-Rabutin writes, "So much the worse for those who refused you, my fair cousin. I do not know if it will profit them anything, but I am sure it does them no honour."

We have mentioned, in the memoir of the duke de la Rochefoucauld, the depraved state of French society during the wars of the Fronde. Madame de Sévigné kept herself far aloof from even the suspicion of misconduct, but her husband imbibed the contagion. The name of his mistress, Ninon de l'Enclos, gave a celebrity 1650.
to his infidelity infinitely painful to his wife. Madame Ætat.
de Sévigné felt her misfortune, but bore it with dignity 24.
and patience. Not long after she had cause to congratulate herself on her forbearance, when her husband was

killed in a duel by the chevalier d'Albret. The occasion of the combat is not known, but such were too frequent in the days of the Fronde. The inconstancy of her husband did not diminish the widow's grief: she had lived six happy years of a brilliant youth with him; his gay, social disposition was exactly such as to win affection; and, when he was lost to her for ever, she probably looked on her jealousy in another light, and felt how trivial such is when compared with the irreparable stroke of death. Her sorrow was profound. Her uncle, the abbé de Coulanges, was her best friend and consoler. He drew her attention to her duties, and assisted her in the arduous task of managing her affairs, embarrassed by her husband's extravagance. She had two young children, and their education was her chief and dearest care, and she was thus speedily recalled to active life.

Her widowhood was exemplary. Left at four-and-twenty without her husband's protection, in the midst of a society loosened from all moral restrictions, in which the highest were the most libertine, no evil breath ever tainted her fair fame. Her cousin, Bussy-Rabutin*, who has distilled, from a venomous pen, poison

* Roger de Rabutin, comte de Bussy, was one of those unfortunate men who, from some malconformity in the structure of their minds, inherit infamy from the use they make of their talents. His youth was spent in gambling, dissipation, duels, and all the disorders of a disorderly period. He was in the army during his early years, and became attached to the great Condé. He served under him when that prince blockaded Paris, and was one of the faction of young men of quality who attempted to govern the court on its return, and who received the name of *Petits-Maîtres* from the witty Parisians, a name afterwards preserved to designate young coxcombs of fashion in almost all countries. When Condé was arrested, he made war against the king in Berri. When liberated, he abandoned him. Insolent and presumptuous, he made an enemy of this great man as well as of Turenne. Bussy attacked the latter in a dull epigram. Turenne's reply was far more witty: he wrote to the king, that "Bussy was the best officer, for songs, that he had in his troop." In like manner, he at first paid his court to Fouquet, and afterwards caballed against him. He had frequently been imprisoned in the Bastile. In 1569 he was exiled. He amused himself during his banishment by writing his "Amours des Gaules," a scandalous history of the time, whose wit cannot redeem the infamy attached to his becoming the betrayer and chronicler of the faults and misfortunes of his friends. Allowed to return to court, he entered into a cabal for the ruin of the duchesse de la Vallière — his own was the consequence. Deprived of his employment, imprisoned in the Bastile, and afterwards exiled, he drank deep of the cup of disappointment and mortification. He continued his work in his retreat; but the exercise of malice and calumny did not compensate for being driven from the arena on which he delighted to figure. Sixteen years afterwards he was allowed to return to court; but it had then lost its charms, especially as the king did not regard him with an eye of favour, so he re-

over the reputation of almost every Frenchwoman of that period, says not a word against her, except that she encouraged sometimes the friendship of those who loved her. No blame can arise from this. It was necessary for the advancement of her children that she should secure the support and friendship of people in power. She lived in a court surrounded by a throng of society: she felt safe, since she could rely on herself; and prudery would only have made her enemies, without any good accruing. The only friend she had who did not deserve the distinction was Bussy-Rabutin; but he being a near relation, and she the head of their house, she showed her kindness and her prudence by continuing to admit him to the honour of her intimacy. In his letters he alludes to the admiration that Fouquet felt for her; and we find that her friendship for him continued unalterable to the last. Bussy rallies her, also, on the admiration of the prince de Conti:—"Take care of yourself, my fair cousin," he writes: "a disinterested lady may, nevertheless, be ambitious; and she who refused the financier of the king may not always resist his majesty's cousin. You are a little ingrate, and will have to pay one day or another. You pursue virtue as if it were a reality, and you despise wealth as if you could never feel the want of it: we shall see you some day regret all this." Again he writes, "One must regulate oneself by you; one is too happy in being allowed to be your friend. There is hardly a woman in the kingdom, except yourself, who can induce your lovers to be satisfied with friendship: we scarcely see any who, rejecting love, are not in a state of enmity. I am certain that it requires a woman of extraordinary merit to turn a lover into a friend." And again, "I do not know any one so generally esteemed as yourself: you are the delight of the human race; antiquity would have raised altars to you; and you would assuredly have been the

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turned once again to his country retreat. He died in 1693, aged seventy-one. Ill brought up and uneducated, wit, sharpened by malice, was his chief talent. He wrote a pure style, but his letters are stiff and dull; and his chief work is remarkable for its license and malice rather than for talent.

goddess of something. In our own times, not being so prodigal of incense, we content ourselves with saying that there does not exist a woman of your age more virtuous and more charming. I know princes of the blood, foreign princes, nobles of high rank, great captains, ministers of state, magistrates, and philosophers, all ready to be in love with you. What can you desire more?" This language deserves quoting only as evidence of the sort of ordeal Madame de Sévigné passed through. While receiving all this flattery, she was never turned aside from her course. To educate her children, take care of their property, secure such a place in society as would be advantageous to them, and to render her uncle's life happy, were the objects of her life. She was very fortunate in her uncle, whose kindness and care were the supports of her life. Her obligations to him are apparent from the letter she wrote many years after, on his death:—"I am plunged in sorrow: ten days ago I saw my dear uncle die, and you know what he was to his dear niece. He has conferred on me every benefit in the world, either by giving me property of his own, or preserving and augmenting that of my children. He drew me from the abyss into which M. de Sévigné's death plunged me: he gained lawsuits; he put my affairs into good order; he paid our debts; he has made the estate on which my son lives the prettiest and most agreeable in the world." She was fortunate, also, in her children, whom she passionately loved. But it must be remembered that children do not entirely occupy a parent's time. She afterwards regretted that her daughter had been brought up in a convent; but, in sending her there, she acted in accordance with the manners of the times.* While her children were away, and when she came up to Paris from her country house, she diversified her life by innocent pleasures. She enjoyed good society, and adorned it. She was one of the favourites of the Hôtel de Rambouillet, where met a

* "J'admire comment j'eus le courage de vous y mettre (au couvent); la pensée de vous voir souvent, et de vous en retirer me fit résoudre à cette barbarie, qui étoit trouvée alors une bonne conduite, et une chose nécessaire à votre éducation."—*Lettre à Mad. de Grignan*, 6 *May*, 1676.

knot of people, who, however they might err in affectation and over refinement, were celebrated for talent and virtue. She was a friend of Julie d'Augennes, afterwards madame de Montauzier; and the *Alcovistes* of the set were her principal friends. Ménage mentions her with admiration, and was accustomed to relate several anecdotes concerning her. He went to visit her in Britany, a great undertaking for a Parisian. The chevalier de Méré, one of the most affected and exaggerated of the *Precieuses*, and also the count de Lude, whom Ménage mentions as one of the four distinguished sayers of *bon mots* of the time, were chief among her friends and admirers.

Her cousin Bussy-Rabutin quarrelled with her. The occasion is not known; but it is suspected that she refused to exert herself to re-establish him in the favour of Fouquet, who was displeased with him. The infamy of his proceeding is almost unexampled. He included mention of her in the portion of his scandalous publication of the "Amours des Gaules" published 1659. In this he does not accuse her of misconduct, but he represents her economy as avarice, her friendship as coquetry; and added to this the outrage of raking up and publishing the misfortunes of her married life, which, though they redounded to her credit, must have deeply hurt a woman of feeling and delicacy. She never forgave her cousin; and, though afterwards reconciled to him, it is evident that she never regarded him with esteem. In addition to this annoyance, her career was not entirely sunny. Her warm heart felt bitterly the misfortunes that befel her friends. Her first sorrow of this kind was the imprisonment, banishment, and adversity of cardinal de Retz. He deserved his downfal,—but not in her eyes. She only saw his talents and amiable qualities; and viewed in him a powerful friend, now overthrown. His imprisonment embittered two years of her life. Her husband's uncle, the chevalier de Sévigné, took an active part in his escape from the citadel of Nantes; but this did not restore him to his friends. He was obliged to

take refuge in Spain; and did not return to France for many years, when he came back an altered man.

Her next misfortune was the fall and banishment of Fouquet. It speaks highly for madame de Sévigné's good sense and superior qualities that, while refusing a man who, in other instances, showed himself presuming from success with other women, she should secure him as a friend. The secret lay in her own feelings of friendship, which being sincere, and yet strictly limited, she acquired his esteem as well as affection. Fouquet was a munificent and generous man, of a superior understanding and unbounded ambition. He dissipated the finances of the state as he spent his own; but he could bestow as well as take, as he proved when, on getting his place of procureur-general to the parliament, he sent in the price (14,000 francs) to the public treasury. The entertainment he gave Louis XIV. at Vaux, which cost 18,000,000 of francs, was the seal of his ruin, already suggested to the king by Colbert. He had made the monarch, already all powerful, fear his victim. Louis fancied that Fouquet had fortified Belle Isle, and that he had a strong party within and without the kingdom. This was a mere mistake, inspired by the superintendent's enemies, to ensure his fall. Madame de Sévigné, Pelisson, Gourville, and mademoiselle Scuderi were his chief friends: joined to these was Pelisson, his confidential clerk. He shared the fall of his master, and was imprisoned in the Bastile; but, undeterred by fear from this, defended him with great eloquence. The simple-minded, true-hearted La Fontaine was another of his firm friends in adversity. The suit against him was carried on for three years. He was pursued with the utmost acrimony and violence by Colbert, Le Tellier, secretary of state, and his rival in credit, and Seguier, the chancellor. During his trial, madame de Sévigné wrote daily to M. de Pomponne, afterwards minister, relating its progress. These letters are very interesting, both from the anecdotes they contain, and the warmth of feeling

the writer displays. Fouquet was treated with the utmost harshness by the chancellor Seguier, whom he answered with spirit, preserving through all a presence of mind, a composure, a dignity, and resolution, which is the more admirable, since, in those days, there was no humiliation of language to which the subjects of Louis XIV. did not descend, and think becoming, as addressed to the absolute arbiter of their destiny.

The sort of interest and terror excited about him is manifest, by the fact, that madame de Sévigné masked herself when she went to see him return from the court, where he was tried, to the Bastile, his prison.* His trial lasted for more than a month. The proceedings against him were carried on with the utmost irregularity; and this and other circumstances — the length of time that had elapsed, which turned the excitement against him into compassion; the earnestness of the solicitations in his favour, together with the virulence with which he was persecuted, — all these things saved his life. Madame de Sévigné announces this news with delight:—"Praise God, and thank him! Our poor friend is saved! Thirteen sided with M. d'Ormesson (*who voted for banishment*), nine with Sainte Helene, (*whose voice was for death*). I am beside myself with joy. How delightful and consolatory must this news

* Il faut que je vous conte ce que j'ai fait. Imaginez vous que des dames m'ont proposé d'aller dans une maison qui regarde droit dans l'arsenal pour voir revenir notre pauvre ami. J'etais masquée; je l'ai vu venir d'assez loin. M. d'Artagnan etoit aupres de lui; cinquante mousquetaires à trente à quarante pas dernière. Il parroissoit assez rêveur. Pour moi, quand je l'ai apperçu, les jambes m'ont tremblé, et le cœur m'a battu si fort, que je ne pouvois plus. En s'approchant de nous pour entrer dans son trou M. d'Artagnan l'a pousse, et lui a fait remarquer que nous etions là. Il nous a donc saluées, et pris cette mine riante que vous lui connoissez. Je ne croie pas qu'il m'a reconnue, mais je vous avoue que j'ai été etrangement saisée quand je l'ai vu entrer dans cette petite porte. Si vous saviez combien on est malheureux quand on a le cœur fait comme je l'ai, je suis assurée que vous auriez pitié de moi; mais je pense que vous n'en etes pas quitte à meilleur marché de la maniere dont je vous connois. J'ai été voir votre chère voisine, je vous plains autant de ne l'avoir plus, que nous nous trouvons heureux de l'avoir. Nous avons bien parlé de notre cher ami: elle a vu Sapho (mademoiselle de Scuderi) qui lui a redonné du courage. Pour moi, j'irai demain le reprendre chez elle car de temps en temps, je sens que j'ai besoin de réconfort: ce n'est pas que, l'on ne dise mille choses qui doivent donner de l'esperance; mais mon dieu, j'ai l'imagination si vive, que tout ce qui est incertain me fait mourir." — *Lettre à M. de Pomponne*, 27 *Novembre*, 1664.

be to you; and what inconceivable pleasure do those moments impart which deliver the heart and the thoughts from such terrible anxiety. It will be long before I recover from the joy I felt yesterday: it is really too complete; I could scarcely bear it. The poor man learnt the news by air (*by means of signals*) a few moments after; and I have no doubt he felt it in all its extent." The king, however, abated this joy. He had been taught to believe that Fouquet was dangerous: fancying this, he of course felt, that, as an exile, he would enjoy every facility for carrying on his schemes. He changed the sentence of banishment into perpetual imprisonment in Pignerol. Fouquet was separated from his wife and family, and from his most faithful servants. At first his friends hoped that his hard fate would be softened. "We hope," writes madame de Sévigné, "for some mitigation: hope has used me too well for me to abandon it. We must follow the example of the poor prisoner: he is gay and tranquil; let us be the same." The king, however, continued inexorable. He remained long in prison: a doubt hangs over the conclusion of his life; and it is not known whether he remained a prisoner to the end. He died in 1680.*

When Fouquet's papers were seized, there were among them a multitude of letters which compromised the reputations of several women of quality. Madame de Sévigné had been in the habit of corresponding with him. The secretary of state, Tellier, declared that her letters were *les plus honnêtes du monde;* but they were written unguardedly, in all the thoughtlessness of youth. She apprehended some annoyance

* On the 3d April, 1680, Madame de Sévigné writes to her daughter, "My dear child, M. Fouquet is dead. I am grieved. Mademoiselle de Scuderi is deeply afflicted. Thus ends a life which it cost so much to preserve." Gourville, in his memoirs, speaks of his being liberated from prison as a certain thing: "M. Fouquet, being some time after set at liberty, heard how I had acted towards his wife, to whom I had lent more than a hundred thousand livres, for her subsistence, for the suit, and even to gain over some of the judges. After having written to thank me," &c. This seems to set the matter at rest. Voltaire says, in the "Siècle de Louis XIV.," that the countess de Vaux (Fouquet's daughter-in-law) confirmed the fact of his liberation: a portion of his family, however, believed differently in after times. His return, if set free, was secret, and did not take place long before his death.

from their having fallen into the hands of the enemy, and thought it right to retire into the country. Bussy-Rabutin put himself forward at this moment to support her: a reconciliation ensued between them,—not very cordial, but which, for some time, continued uninterrupted.

Madame de Sévigné's retreat was not of long continuance. It took place when Fouquet was first arrested, and she returned to court long before his trial. Her daughter was presented in 1663. The following year was rendered remarkable by the brilliancy of the 1664. *fêtes* given at Versailles.* The carousals or tourn- Ætat. aments were splendid, from the number of combatants 38. and the magnificence of the dresses and accoutrements. The personages that composed the tournament passed in review before the assembled court. The king repre- 1665. sented Roger. All the diamonds of the crown were Ætat. lavished on his dress and the harness of his horse: his 39. page bore his shield, whose device was composed by Benserade, who had a happy talent for composing these slight commemorations of the feelings and situation of the real person, mingled with an apt allusion to the person represented. The queen, attended by three hundred ladies, witnessed the review from under triumphal arches. Amidst this crowd of ladies, lost in it to all but the heart of Louis, and shrinking from observation, was mademoiselle de la Vallière, the real object of the monarch's magnificent display. The cavalcade was followed by an immense gilt car, representing the chariot of the sun. It was surrounded by the four Ages, the Seasons, and the Hours. Shepherds arranged the lists, and other characters recited verses written for the occasion. The tournament over, the feast succeeded, and, darkness being come, the place was illuminated by 4000 flambeaux. Two hundred persons, dressed as fauns, sylvans, and dryads, together with shepherds, reapers, and vine-dressers, served at the

* Voltaire, Siècle de Louis XIV. chap. xxv.

numerous tables; a theatre arose, as if by magic, behind the tables; the arcades that surrounded the whole circuit were ornamented with 500 girandoles of green and silver, and a gilt balustrade shut in the whole. Molière's play of the "Princesse d'Elide," agreeable at the time from the allusions it contained, his comedy of the "Mariàge Forcée," and three acts of the "Tartuffe," added the enduring stamp of genius to mere outward show and splendour. Mademoiselle de Sévigné appeared in these *fêtes*. In 1663 she represented a shepherdess in a ballet; and the verses which Benserade wrote for her to repeat show that she was held in consideration as one of the most charming beauties of the court, and as the daughter of one of its loveliest and most respected ornaments. In 1664 she appeared as Cupid disguised, as a Nereid*; and as Omphale in 1665. We must not forget that at this very time, while enjoying her daughter's success, madame de Sévigné was interesting herself warmly for Fouquet. The favour of a court could not make her forget her friends. Her chief object of interest, as personally regarded herself at this time, was the marriage of her daughter. Her son was in the army. When only nineteen he joined the expedition undertaken by the dukes of Noailles and Beaufort for the succour of Candia. On this, madame de Sévigné writes to the comte de Bussy,—"I suppose you know that my son is gone to Candia with M. de Roannes and the comte de Saint Paul. He mentioned it to M. de Turenne, to cardinal de Retz, and to M. de la Rochefoucauld. These gentlemen so approved his design that it was resolved on and made public before I knew any thing of it. He is

* In the verses made on this occasion the poet alludes also to the beauty of her mother: —

"Vous travestir ainsi, c'est bien ingénu,
Amour, c'est comme si, pour n'être pas connu,
Avec une innocence extreme
Vous vous deguisez en vous-meme
Elle a vos traits, vos yeux, votre air engageant,
Et de même que vous, sourit en égorgéant;
Enfin qui fit l'un a fait l'autre,
Et jusque à sa mère, elle est comme la votre."

gone. I wept his departure bitterly, and am deeply afflicted. I shall not have a moment's repose during this expedition. I see all the dangers, and they destroy me; but I am not the mistress. On such occasions mothers have no voice." She had foundation for anxiety, for few among the officers that accompanied this expedition ever returned. The baron de Sévigné was, however, among these: he had distinguished himself; and, as the foundation for his military career, his mother bought for him, at a large pecuniary sacrifice, the commission of *guidon*, or ensign, in the regiment of the dauphin. The marriage of her daughter was a still more important object. *La plus jolie fille de France* she delights in naming her; yet it was long before she was satisfied with any of those who pretended to her hand. At length the count de Grignan offered him- 1669.
self. He was a widower of two marriages: he was Ætat.
not young, yet his offer pleased the young lady, and 43.
possessed many advantages in the eyes of the mother, on account of the excellent character which he bore, his rank, and his wealth. "I must tell you a piece of news," madame de Sévigné writes to the count de Bussy, "which will doubtless delight you. At length, the prettiest woman in France is about to marry, not the handsomest youth, but the most excellent man in the kingdom. You have long known M. de Grignan. All his wives are dead to make room for your cousin, as well as, through wonderful luck, his father and his son; so that, being richer than he ever was, and being, through his birth, his position, and his good qualities, such as we desire, we conclude at once. The public appears satisfied, and that is much, for one is silly enough to be greatly influenced by it."

Soon after this period the correspondence began which contains the history of the life of madame de Sévigné,—a life whose migrations were not much more important than those of the Vicar of Wakefield, "from the blue bed to the brown;" her residence in Paris being varied only by journeys to her estate in Britany, or by

visits to her daughter in Provence. But such was the vivacity of her mind, and the sensibility of her heart, that these changes, including separations from and meetings with her daughter, assume the guise of important events, bringing in their train heart-breaking grief, or abundant felicity.

When she accepted M. de Grignan as her son-in-law, she fancied that, by marrying her daughter to a courtier, they would pass their lives together. But, soon after, M. de Grignan, who was lieutenant-general to the duke de Vendôme, governor of Provence, received an order to repair to the government, where he commanded during the almost uninterrupted absence of the duke. This was a severe blow. Her child torn from her, she was as widowed a second time: her only consolation was in the hope of reunion, and in a constant and voluminous correspondence. Mother and daughter interchanged letters twice a week. As their lives are undiversified by events, we wonder what interest can be thrown over so long a series, which is often a mere reiteration of the same feelings and the same thoughts. Here lie the charm and talent of madame de Sévigné. Her warm heart and vivacious intellect exalted every emotion, vivified every slight event, and gave the interest of talent and affection to every thought and every act. Her letters are the very reverse of prosy; and though she writes of persons known to her daughter and unknown to us, and in such hints as often leave much unexplained, yet her pen is so graphic, her style so easy and clear, pointed and finished, even in its sketchiness, that we become acquainted with her friends, and take interest in the monotonous course of her life. To give an idea of her existence, as well as of her correspondence, we will touch on the principal topics.

In the first place, we must give some account of the person to whom they were addressed. Madame la comtesse de Grignan was a very different person from her mother. From some devotional scruples she destroyed all her own letters, so that we cannot judge of

their excellence; but there can be no doubt that she was a very clever woman. She studied and loved the philosophy of Descartes; and it is even suspected that she was, in her youth, something of an *esprit fort* in her opinions. She conducted herself admirably as a wife; she was an anxious but not a tender mother. Here was the grand difference between her and her mother. The heart of madame de Sévigné overflowed with sympathy and tenderness; her daughter, endowed with extreme good sense, wit, and a heart bent on the fulfilment of her duties, had no tenderness of disposition. She left her eldest child, a little girl, behind her, in Paris, almost from the date of its birth. Apparently this poor child had some defect which determined her destiny in a convent from her birth; for her mother seems afraid of showing kindness, and shut her up at the age of nine in the religious house where afterwards she assumed the veil; her vocation to the state being very problematical. It was through the continual remonstrances and representations of madame de Sévigné that she kept her youngest daughter at home. She was more alive to maternal affection towards her son; but this was mixed with the common feeling of interest in the heir of her house. There was something hard in her character that sometimes made her mother's intense affection a burden. Madame de Sévigné's distinctive quality was amiability: we should say that her daughter was decidedly unamiable. These were, to a great degree, the faults of a young person, probably of temper: they disappeared afterwards, when experience taught her feeling, and time softened the impatience of youth. We find a perfect harmony between mother and daughter subsist during the latter years of the life of the former, and repose succeed to the more stormy early intercourse. Madame de Grignan, prudent and anxious by nature, spent a life of considerable care. The expenses of her husband's high situation, and his own extravagant tastes, caused him to spend largely. Her son entered life early, and his career was the object

of great solicitude. Her health was precarious. All this was excitement for her mother's sympathy; and her letters are full of earnest discussion, intense anxiety, or lively congratulation on the objects of her daughter's interest, and her well-being.

The next object of her affection, and subject of her pen, was her son. He was a man of wit and talent; but the thoughtlessness, the what the French call *légèreté* of his character, caused his mother much anxiety, at the same time that his good spirits, his confidence in her, and his amiable temper, contributed to her happiness. She often calls him the best company in the world; and laments, at the same time, his pursuits and ill luck. He was a favourite of the best society in Paris, and, among others, of the famous Ninon de l'Enclos. Ninon had many great and good qualities; but madame de Sévigné's dislike to her dated far back, and was justifiably founded on the conduct of her husband. At the age of thirty-five Ninon had been the successful rival of a young and blooming wife; at that of fifty-five the son wore her chains.* Madame de Sévigné could never reconcile herself to this intimacy. "She spoiled your father," she writes to madame de Grignan, while she relates the methods used to attach her son. Sometimes this son, who was brave, and eager to distinguish himself, was exposed to the dangers of war; sometimes he spent his time at court, where he waited on the dauphin, squandering time and money among the courtiers, charming the circle by his vanity and wit, but gaining no advancement; sometimes he accompanied his mother to Britany; and we find

* At the age of seventy-six, madame de Sévigné's grandson, the young marquis de Grignan, sought her friendship; thus, in some sort, she reigned over three generations of the same family. The one fault of Ninon so unsexes her that we must regard her character rather as belonging to a man than a woman. "I saw the disadvantages women labour under," she said, "and I chose to assume the position of a man (et je me fis homme)." She regulated her conduct by what was considered honourable in a man — honourable, not moral. Her talents and generous qualities caused her to be respected and loved by a large circle of distinguished friends. Madame de Maintenon was her early and intimate friend: even when she became devout she continued to prize Ninon's friendship, and wrote to her to give good lessons to her incorrigible brother.

him enlivening her solitude, and bestowing on her the tenderest filial attentions. He was an unlucky man. He got no promotion in the army, and, being too impatient for a courtier, soon got wearied of waiting for advancement. He perplexed his mother by his earnest wish to sell his commission; and the failure in her projects of marriage for him annoyed her still more. At length he chose for himself: renouncing his military employments, retiring from the court, and even from Paris, he married a lady of his own province, and fixed himself entirely in Britany. His wife was an amiable, quiet, unambitious person, with a turn for devotion, which increased through the circumstance of their having no children. Madame de Sévigné was too pious to lament this, now that the destiny of her son was decided as obscure, and that she saw him happy: on the contrary, she rejoiced in finding him adopt religious principles, which rendered his life peaceful, and his character virtuous.

The principal friends of madame de Sévigné were united in what she termed the Fauxbourg, where the house of madame de la Fayette, then the resort of the persons most distinguished in Paris for talent, wit, refinement, and good moral conduct, was situated. Madame de la Fayette, and her friend the duke de la Rochefoucauld, have already been introduced to the reader in the memoir of the latter. It would seem that the lady was not a favourite with madame de Grignan, and that, with all her talents, she was not popular; but she had admirable qualities; the use of the French term *vraie* was invented as applicable to her; for Rochefoucauld abridged into this single word Segrais' description, that "she loved the true in all things." This excess of frankness gave her, with some, an air of dryness; and madame de Sévigné's children did not share her affection, which even did not blind her to her friend's defects. Speaking of the Fauxbourg, she says, "I am loved as much as she can love." In an age when there was so much disquisition on character and motive, and in a mind like

madame de Sévigné's, so open to impression, and so penetrating, it is no wonder that slight defects were readily discerned, nor that they should be mentioned in so open-hearted an intercourse as that between mother and daughter. All human beings have blots and slurs in their character, or they would not be human. We judge by the better part—by that which raises a circle or an individual superior to the common run, not by those failings which stamp all our fellow-creatures as sons of Adam. Thus, we may pronounce on madame de la Fayette as being one of the most remarkable women of the age, for talent, for wit, and for the sincerity, strength, and uprightness of her character. She suffered much from ill health. Her society was confined to that which she assembled at her own house; but that circumstance only rendered it the more chosen and agreeable.

M. and madame de Coulanges formed its ornaments. He was madame de Sévigné's cousin, and brought up with her, though several years younger. His lively thoughtless disposition made him the charm of society. He was educated for the bar, but was far too vivacious to make his way. He was pleading a suit concerning a marsh disputed by two peasants, one of whom was called Grappin: — perceiving that he was getting confused in the details, and in the points of law, he suddenly broke off his speech, exclaiming, "Excuse me, gentlemen, but I am drowning myself in Grappin's marsh: I am your most obedient;" and so threw up his brief, and, it is said, never took another.* He was,

* His song, excusing his idleness, is very good: it is in dialogue between himself and the chief among those who blamed him, the count de Bussy-Rabutin.

" Air. — '*Or nous dites, Marie.*'

Bussy.

" Or nous dites, Coulanges,
Magistrat sans pareil,
Par quel destin étrange
Quittez-vous le conseil ?

Coulanges.

" Lisez, lisez l'histoire :
Vous verrez qu'avant nous
Les héros, las de gloire,
Allaient planter des choux.

in youth, and continued to the end of his life, a man of pleasure, singing with spirit songs which he made impromptu, and which, afterwards, every one learnt as *apropos* of the events of the day; a teller of good stories, a lover of good dinners, an enjoyer of good wine; charming every one by the exuberance of his spirits; amusing others, because he himself was amused. He loved books, he cultivated his taste, and collected pictures, joining the refinements and tastes of a gentleman to the hilarity and recklessness of a boy.

BUSSY.

"Le bel exemple à suivre
Que Dioclétien!
Est-ce ainsi qu'il faut vivre?
Il n'etoit pas chrétien.

COULANGES.

"Charles-Quint, qu'on admire,
En a bien fait autant:
Quitta-t'-il pas l'empire
Pour être plus content?

BUSSY.

"Oui, mais dans la retraite
Savez-vous ce qu'il fit?
Chagrin dans sa chambrette,
Souvent s'en repentit.

COULANGES.

"La savante Christine
Ne s'en repentit pas;
Et de cette héroine
Je veut suivre les pas.

BUSSY.

"Mais d'Azolin dans Rome
Ignorez-vous les bruits?
Et que ce galant homme
Sut charmer ses ennuis?

COULANGES.

"Du feu roi de Pologne,
Monsieur, que dites-vous?
Tranquille et sans vergogne
Il vient parmi nous.

BUSSY.

"Oui, mais son inconstance,
Moine, roi, cardinal,
Le fit venir en France
Mourir à l'hôpital.

COULANGES.

"Le diable vous emporte,
Monsieur, et vos raisons!
Je vivrois de la sorte
Et ferai des chansons."

His wife, a relation of le Tellier and Louvois, enjoyed the reputation of a wit, as well as of being the most charming woman in Paris. She had good sense, and was often annoyed by her husband's thoughtlessness, which caused him to degenerate at times into buffoonery; while her repartees and letters caused her to be universally cited and esteemed*; and her easy agreeable conversation made her the delight of every one who knew her. The airiness of her mind is well expressed in the names madame de Sévigné gives her in her correspondence: la Mouche, la Feuille, la Sylphide all denote a mixture of lightness, gaiety, and grace, with a touch of coquetry, and the *piquancé* of wit, whose point was sharp, but free from venom. When madame de Maintenon became the chief lady in the kingdom, she was charmed to have near her this early friend and amusing companion. Madame de Coulanges frequented court assiduously, but she enjoyed no place. Her species of intellect was characteristic of the times. The conceits, mystifications, and metaphysical flights of the Hôtel de Rambouillet had given place to wit, and to sententious and pointed, yet perspicuous and natural, turns of expression. Truth and clearness, and a certain sort of art, that shrouded itself in an appearance of simplicity, was the tone aimed at by those who wished to shine. Equivokes, *sous-entendres*, metaphors, and antithesis, all kinds of trifles, sarcastic or laudatory, were lightly touched on, coloured for a moment with rainbow-hues, and vanished as fast: these were the fashion; and no conversation was more replete with these, and yet freer from obvious pretension, than that of madame de Coulanges. It is true that there must always be a sort of pedantry in an adherence to a fashion; but, when the manner is graceful, smiling, unaffected, and original, the pretension is lost in the pleasure derived. All this was natural to

* At the time of the dauphin's marriage, when madame de Coulanges was presented to the dauphine, the latter received her with a compliment on her wit and letters, of which she had heard in Germany. At this time madame de Sévigné writes, —"Madame de Coulanges is at St. Germain: she does wonders at court: she is with her three friends (mesdames de Richelieu, de Maintenon, and de Rochefort) at their private hours. Her wit is a qualification of dignity at court."—April 5. 1680.

madame de Coulanges. Her confessor said of her, "Each of this lady's sins is an epigram." When recovering from a severe illness, madame de Sévigné announced, as the sign of her convalescence, "Epigrams are beginning to be pointed;" not that by epigrams sarcasms were meant, but merely novel turns of expression, words wittily applied, ideas full of *finesse*, that pleased by their originality. She and her husband were, perhaps, too much alike to accord well: she was annoyed at his want of dignity, and the heedlessness that, joined to her extravagance, left them poor and himself unconsidered. He liked to be where he was more at his ease than in his wife's company. Her faults, however, diminished as she grew old. She learnt to appreciate the court at its true value. She ceased her attendance on madame de Maintenon; but her intimacy with Ninon de l'Enclos continued to the end of her life. The ingratitude of her court friends, the smallness of her fortune, her advancing age, and consequent loss of beauty, and her weak health, rendered her neither crabbed nor sad: on the contrary, she became indulgent, gentle, and contented.

Her husband preserved his characteristics to the end. When exhorted by a preacher to more serious habits, he replied by an impromptu:—

"Je voudrois, à mon âge,
Il en seroit le temps,
Etre moins volage
Que les jeunes gens,
Et mettre en usage
D'un vieillard bien sage
Tous les sentimens.

"Je voudrois du viel homme
Etre séparé;
Le morceau de pomme
N'est pas digéré."*

He died at the advanced age of eighty.

* The best known of his couplets are the following philosophic ones:—

"D'Adam nous sommes tous enfans:
La chose est très-connue,
Et que tous nos premiers parens
Ont mené la charrue;
Mais, las de cultiver enfin
Sa terre labourée,
L'un a détesté le matin,
L'autre l'après-dînée."

During the earlier portion of the correspondence, madame Scarron figures as one of the favourite guests of the Fauxbourg. Her husband was dead, and she was living at the Hôtel d'Albret, among her earliest friends. The latter correspondence is full of anecdotes about her, as madame de Maintenon, and indicate her gradual advancement; but those which speak of her early days, when she was the charm and ornament of her circle, merely through her talents, and agreeable and excellent qualities, are the most interesting.

Corbinelli was another chief friend of madame de Sévigné. He was descended from an Italian, who came into France on the marriage of Catherine de'Medici and Henry II. His father was attached to marshal d'Ancre, and was enveloped in his ruin. We have no details of his actual circumstances, except that, although he was poor, his position in society was brilliant. A stranger, without employment, without fortune or rank, he was sought, esteemed, and loved by the first society; while his character presents many contradictions. Studious and accomplished, a man of learning and science, he only wrote compilations. Something of a sceptic, he studied religion, and became a quietist. Pitied by his friends, as neither rich nor great, he passed a happy life; and, though always in ill health, his life was prolonged to more than a century. He was one of madame de Sévigné's most familiar friends. In early life he had had employments under cardinal Mazarin. He was a friend of the marquis de Vardes, and shared the disgrace he incurred, together with Bussy-Rabutin and others, on account of certain letters fabricated, pretending to be written by the king of Spain, for the purpose of informing his sister, the queen of France, of Louis XIV.'s attachment for mademoiselle de la Vallière. This event was fatal to his fortunes; but it developed his talents, since he made use of the leisure afforded by his retreat for the purpose of study. He applied himself to the theories of Descartes, and became deeply versed in classic literature. At one time he turned his attention to the study of law, but soon threw it aside with disgust: his

clear and comprehensive understanding was utterly alien to the contradictions, subterfuges, and confusion of old French law. In religion, he sided with the mystics and quietists; but was more of a philosopher than a religionist; and chose his party for its being more allied to protestant tenets, and because, M. de Sévigné says, his mysticism freed him from the necessity of going to mass. He was a mixture of Stoic and Epicurean. He would not go half a league on horseback, he said, to seek a throne. And thus he harmonised his temper with his fortunes, for he was an unlucky man. "His merit brings him ill luck," madame de la Fayette said. It may be added that it brought also a contented mind, a friendly disposition, and calm studious habits. An amusing anecdote is told of his presence of mind in extricating himself from a dilemma in which he was placed.

Louis XIV. learnt that the prince of Conti, and other young and heedless nobles of high rank, had, at a certain supper, uttered various sarcasms against, and told stories to the discredit of, himself and madame de Maintenon. The king wished to learn the details, and sent D'Argenson to inquire of Corbinelli, who was supposed to have been at the supper. Corbinelli was by this time grown old and deaf. "Where did you sup on such an evening?" asked D'Argenson. "I do not remember," the other replied. "Are you acquainted with such and such princes?" "I forget." "Did you not sup with them?" "I do not in the least remember?" "It seems to me that a man like you ought to recollect these things." "True, sir, but before a man like you, I am not a man like myself." Madame de Sévigné's correspondence with this accomplished and valued friend is lost, but her letters to her daughter are full of expressions of esteem and friendship towards him.

Thus, in her letters, we find all the events of the day alluded to in the tone used by this distinguished society. Some of the observations are witty and amusing; others remarkable for their truth, founded on a just

and delicate knowledge of the human heart.* These are mingled with details of the events of the day. We may mention, among others, the letters that regard the death of Turenne. The glory that lighted up that name shines with peculiar brilliancy in her pages. His heroism, gentleness, and generosity are all recorded with enthusiasm.† Sometimes her letters re-

* Turning over her pages, we frequently find reflections such as the following, which, from its gentleness and feeling, is singularly characteristic of the amiable writer :—" Vous savez que je suis toujours un peu entêtée de mes lectures. Ceux à qui je parle ont intérêt que je lise de bons livres : celui dont il s'agit présentement, c'est cette Morale de Nicole : il y a un traité sur les moyens d'entretenir la paix entre les hommes, qui me ravit : je n'ai jamais rien vu de plus utile, ni si plein d'esprit et de lumières. Si vous ne l'avez pas lu, lisez-le ; si vous l'avez lu, relisez-le avec une nouvelle attention : je crois que tout le monde s'y trouve ; pour moi, je suis persuadée qu'il a été fait à mon intention ; j'espère aussi d'en profiter ; j'y ferai mes efforts. Vous savez que je ne puis souffrir que les vieilles gens disent, 'Je suis trop vieux pour me corriger :' je pardonnerois plutôt aux jeunes gens de dire, 'Je suis trop jeune.' La jeunesse est si aimable, qu'il faudrait l'adorer, si l'âme et l'esprit etoient aussi parfaits que le corps ; mais quand on n'est plus jeune, c'est alors qu'il faudroit se perfectionner, et tâcher de regagner par les bonnes qualités ce qu'on perd du côté des agréable. Il y a long-temps que j'ai fait ces réflexions, et pour cette raison je veux tous les jours travailler à mon esprit, à mon âme, à mon cœur, à mes sentimens. Voilà de quoi je suis pleine, et de quoi je remplis cette lettre, n'ayant pas beaucoup d'autres sujets." — Aux Rochers, 7. Oct. 1671. With regard to the book that gave rise to these reflections, M. de Sévigné, her son, who had a more enlightened taste as to style, by no means approved it. He says, " Et moi, je vous dirai que le premier tome des Essais de Morale vous paroitroit tout comme à moi, si la Marans et l'abbé Têtu ne vous avoient accoutumée aux choses fines et distillées. Ce n'est pas aujourd'hui que le galimathias vous parois clair et aisé : de tout ce qui a parlé de l'homme, et l'intérieur de l'homme, je n'ai rien vu de moins agréable; ce ne sont point là ces portraits où tout le monde se reconnoit. Pascal, la logique de Port Royal, et Plutarque, et Montaigne, parlent autrement : celui-ci parle parce qu'il veut parler, et souvent il n'a pas grand' chose à dire."

† Take, for instance, the following extracts on the subject of his death : — " Ne croyez point, ma fille, que le souvenir de M. de Turenne soit déjà finit dans ce pays-ci ; ce fleuve, qui entraine tout, n'entraine pas sitôt une telle mémoire ; elle est consacrée à l'immortalité. J'étois l'autre jour chez M. de la Rochefoucauld, avec madame de Lavardin, madame de la Fayette, et M. de Marsillac. M. le Premier y vint. La conversation dura deux heures sur les divines qualités de ce véritable héros : tous les yeux étoient baignés de larmes, et vous ne saurièz croire comme la douleur de sa perte est profondément gravé dans les cœurs. Nous remarquions une chose, c'est que ce n'est pas depuis sa mort que l'on admire la grandeur de son cœur, l'étendue de ses lumières, et l'élévation de son âme ; tout le monde en étoit plein pendant sa vie, et vous pouvez penser ce que fait sa perte par-dessus ce qu'on étoit déjà : enfin, ne croyez point que cette mort soit ici comme celle des autres. Vous pouvez en parler tant qu'il vous plaira, sans croire que la dose de votre douleur l'emporte sur la nôtre. Pour son âme, c'est encore un miracle qui vient de l'estime parfaite qu'on avoit pour lui ; il n'est pas tombé dans la tête d'aucun dévot qu'elle ne fut pas en bon état : on ne sauroit comprendre que le mal et le péché pussent être dans son cœur : sa conversion si sincère nous a paru comme un baptême ; chacun conte l'innocence de ses mœurs, la pureté de ses intentions, son humilité, éloignée de toute sorte d'affectation; la solide gloire dont il étoit plein, sans faste et sans ostentation ; aimant la vertu pour elle-même, sans se soucier

cord the gossip, sometimes the *bon mots*, of the day; and each finds its place, and is told with grace, simplicity, and ease.

From this scene, full of life and interest, at the call of duty, she visited Britany; and, when her uncle desired, or motives of economy urged, buried herself in the solitude of her country seat of Les Rochers, a *château* belonging to the family of Sévigné, one league from Vitré, and still further from Rennes. As far as the character and person of the writer are concerned, we prefer the letters written from this retirement to those that record the changes and chances of her Parisian life. They breathe affection and peace, the natural sentiments of a kind heart, an enlightened taste, and an active mind. "At length, my child," she writes, on her first visit to her solitude after her daughter's marriage (May 31. 1671), "here I am at these poor Rochers. Can I see these avenues, these devices, my cabinet and books, and this room, without dying of sor-

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de l'approbation des hommes; une charité généreuse et chrétienne. Vous ai-je dit comme il l'habilla ce régiment anglois? il lui coûta quatorze mille francs, et il resta sans argent. Les Anglois ont dit à M. de Lorges qu'ils achèveroient de servir cette campagne, pour venger la mort de M. de Turenne, mais qu'après cela ils se retireroient, ne pouvant obéir à d'autres que lui. Il y avoit de jeunes soldats qui s'impatientoient un peu dans les marais, où ils étoient dans l'eau jusqu'aux genoux; et les vieux soldats leur disoient 'Quoi, vous vous plaignez! ' On voit bien que vous ne connoissez pas M. de Turenne: il est plus fâché que nous quand nous sommes mal; il ne songe, à l'heure qu'il est, qu'à nous tirer d'ici; il veille quand nous dormons; c'est notre père: on voit bien que vous êtes jeunes. Et c'est ainsi qu'ils les rassuroient. Tout ce que je vous mande est vrai; je ne me charge point des fadaises dont on croit faire plaisir aux gens éloignés: c'est abuser d'eux, et je choisis bien plus ce que je vous écris, que ce que je vous dirois, si vous étiez ici. Je reviens à son âme: c'est donc une chose à remarquer, que nul dévot ne s'est avisé de douter que Dieu ne l'eût reçue à bras ouverts, comme une des plus belles et des meilleures qui soient jamais sorties de ses mains. Méditez sur cette confiance générale sur son salut, et vous trouverez que c'est une espèce de miracle qui n'est que pour lui. Vous verrez dans les nouvelles les effets de cette grande perte." — 15 Août, 1675.

"M. de Barillon soupa ici hier: on ne parla que de M. de Turenne, il en est véritablement très-affligé. Il nous contoit la solidité de ses vertus, combien il étoit vrai, combien il aimoit la vertu pour elle-même, combien pour elle seule il se trouvoit récompensé, et puis finit par dire que l'on ne pouvoit pas l'aimer, ni être touché de son mérite, sans en être plus honnête homme. Sa société communiquoit une horreur pour la friponnerie, pour la duplicité, qui mettoit ses amis au-dessus des autres hommes. Bien de siècles n'en donneront pas un pareil. Je ne trouve pas qu'on soit tout-à-fait aveugle en celui-ci, au moins les gens que je vois. Je crois que c'est vanter d'être en bonne compagnie." — 28 Août, 1675.

row?" There are many agreeable memories, but so many that are tender and lively, that I can scarcely support them: those that are associated with you are of this number. Can you not understand their effect on my heart? My young trees are surprisingly beautiful. Pilois (her gardener) raises them to the sky with an admirable straightness. Really, nothing can be more beautiful than the avenues you saw planted. You remember that I gave you an appropriate device: here is one I carved on a tree for my son, who has returned from Candia: *Vago di fama.* Is it not pretty to say so much in a single word? Yesterday I had carved, in honour of the indolent, *Bella cosa far niente.* Alas, dear child, how rustic my letters are! Where is the time when I could speak, as others do, of Paris? You will receive only news of myself; and such is my confidence, that I am persuaded that you will like these letters as well as my others. The society I have here pleases me much. Our abbé (the abbé de Coulanges, her uncle, who resided constantly with her) is always delightful. My son and La Mousse (a relation of M. de Coulanges) suit me extremely, and I suit them. We are always together; and, when business takes me from them, they are in despair, and think me very silly to prefer a farmer's account to a tale of La Fontaine." —"Your brother is a treasure of folly, and is delightful here. We have sometimes serious conversations, by which he may profit; but there is something of whipped cream in his character: with all that, he is amiable."—"We are reading Tasso with pleasure. I find myself an adept, through the good masters I had. My son reads "Cleopatra" (a romance of Calprenède) to La Mousse; and, in spite of myself, I listen, and find amusement. My son is setting off for Lorraine: his absence will give me much *ennui.* You know how sorry I am to see agreeable company depart; and you have been witness, also, to my transports of joy when I see a carriage drive away with that which restrained and annoyed me; and how this caused us to decide that

bad company was better than good. I remember all the follies we committed here, and every thing you did or said: the recollection never quits me. All the young plantations you saw are delicious. I delight in raising this young generation; and often, without thinking of the injury to my profit, I cut down great trees, because they overshadow and inconvenienc my young children. My son looks on; but I do not suffer him to make the application my conduct might inspire." It was not, however, always solitude at the Rochers. The duke of Chaulnes was lieutenant-governor of Britany; and he and the duchess were too happy to visit madame de Sévigné, and to persuade her to join them when they visited the province, to hold the assembly of the states. From such a busy scene she gladly plunges again into her avenues and old halls, her moonlight walks, and darling reveries. She returned 1672.
to Paris in December; and, in July of the following Ætat.
year, visited her daughter in Provence, where she spent 46.
fifteen months. These periods, so full of happiness to her, are blanks to us; and when, with tears and sighs, she tears herself away from Grignan, and the letters begin again, our amusement and delight recommences. In 1674, madame de Grignan visited Paris, and re- 1674.
mained fourteen months. Parisian society was invested Ætat.
for the tender mother with a charm and an interest, 48.
which became mingled with sadness on her daughter's departure.

The letters on this separation are rendered interesting 1675.
by the circumstance of her intimacy with cardinal Ætat.
de Retz, who was then projecting abdicating his car- 49.
dinal's hat, which the pope forbade, and his retreat, for the sake of paying his debts. This last was a measure founded on motives of honour and integrity, whatever his adversary, M. de la Rochefoucauld, may say to the contrary. The esteem, amounting to respect, which madame de Sévigné expresses for him, raises them both. The death of Turenne happened also during this spring, and the letters are redeemed from the only fault

which a certain sort of minds might find with them, that of frivolity. If they are frivolous, what are our own lives? Let us turn our eyes towards ourselves, and ask, if we daily put down our occupations, the subjects of our conversation, our pleasures and our serious thoughts, would they not be more empty of solid information than madame de Sévigné's letters; or, if more learned, will they not be less wise, and, above all, deficient in the warmth of heart that burns in hers? In the summer of this year, she would fain have visited her daughter; but her uncle insisted that a journey to Britany was necessary for the final settlement of their mutual affairs, as he was grown old, and might die any day. She arrived at the Rochers at the end of September. Her life was more lonely than during the previous visit, for her only companion was her uncle. She had felt deeply disappointed at giving up her journey to Provence, and the additional distance between her and her daughter, when in Britany, was hard to bear. "We were far enough off," she writes; "another hundred leagues added pains my heart; and I cannot dwell upon the thought without having great need of your sermons. What you say of the little profit you often derive from them yourself displays a tenderness that greatly pleases me. You wish me, then, to speak of my woods. The sterility of my letters does not disgust you. Well, dear child! I may tell you, that I do honour to the moon, which I love, as you know. The good abbé fears the dew: I never suffer from it, and I remain, with Beaulieu (her dog) and my servants in attendance, till eight o'clock. Indeed, these avenues are of a beauty, and breathe a tranquillity, a peace, and a silence, of which I can never have too much. When I think of you, it is with tenderness; and I must leave it to you to imagine whether I feel this deeply — I cannot express it. I am glad to feel alone, and fear the arrival of some ladies, that is, of constraint." Her residence in the province was painfully disturbed, on account of the riots which had taken place at

Rennes, on account of the taxes; and the governor had brought down 4000 soldiers to punish the inhabitants. Ever fearful that her letters might be read at the post, madame de Sévigné never directly blames any act of government, but her disapprobation and regret are plainly expressed. "I went to see the duchess de Chaulnes, at Vitré, yesterday," she writes, "and dined there: she received me with joy, and conversed with me for two hours, with affection and eagerness; relating their conduct for the last six months, and all she suffered, and the dangers she ran. I thanked her for her confidence. In a word, this province has been much to blame; but it is cruelly punished, so that it will never recover. There are 5000 soldiers at Rennes, of which one half will pass the winter. They have taken, at hazard, five-and-twenty or thirty men, whom they are about to hang. Parliament is transferred — this is the great blow — for, without that, Rennes is not a better town than Vitré. The misfortunes of the province delay all business, and complete our ruin." —"They have laid tax of 100,000 crowns on the citizens; and, if this sum be not forthcoming in twenty-four hours, it will be doubled, and exacted by the soldiers. They have driven away and banished the inhabitants of one whole street, and forbidden any one to give them refuge, on pain of death; so that you see these poor wretches — women lately brought to bed, old men and children—wander weeping from the town, not knowing whither to go, without food or shelter. Sixty citizens are arrested: to-morrow they begin to hang. This province is an example to others, teaching them, above all, to respect their governors and their wives; not to call them names, nor to throw stones in their garden." Coming back from these scenes, which filled her with grief and indignation, she returns to her woods. "I have business with the abbé: I am with my dear workmen; and life passes so quickly, and, consequently, we approach our end so fast, that I wonder how one can feel worldly affairs so deeply. My woods

inspire me with these reflections. My people have such ridiculous care of me, that they guard me in the evening, completely armed, while the only enemy they find is a squirrel." These twilight walks had a sorrowful conclusion. In January she was suddenly laid prostrate by rheumatism: it was the first illness she ever had — the first intimation she had received, she says, that she was not immortal. Her son was with her: they were better friends than ever. "There is no air of maternity," she writes, "in our intercourse: he is excellent company, and he finds me the same." On this disaster, his tenderness and attentions were warm and sedulous. "Your brother," she writes, "has been an inexpressible consolation to me." She at first made light of her attack, in her letters, though she was obliged to acknowledge that she could not move her right side, and was forced to write the few lines she was able to trace with her left hand; and soon she lost even the power of using this. In the then state of medicine, her cure, of course, was long and painful.

1676. Ætat. 50.

This illness deranged many of madame de Sévigné's plans. On her return to Paris, she was ordered to take medicinal baths, to complete her cure. She went to Vichi, where her health mended, and then returned to Paris, where she expected a speedy visit from her daughter. Her letters during this period are very diverting. She throws an interest over every detail. The one that describes her visit at Versailles, on her return, gives us a lively and picturesque account of the etiquette and amusements of the court.*

* "Voici un changement de scène qui vous paroîtra aussi agréable qu'à tout le monde. Je fus samedi à Versailles avec les Villars. Vous connoissez la toilette de la reine, la messe, le dîner: mais il n'est pas besoin de se faire étouffer pendant que leurs majestés sont à table; car à trois heures le roi, la reine, monsieur, madame, mademoiselle, tout ce qu'il y a de princes et de princesses, madame de Montespan, toute sa suite, tous les courtisans, toutes les dames, enfin ce qui s'appelle la cour de France, se trouve dans ce bel appartement du roi que vous connoissez. Tout est meublé divinement—tout est magnifique. On ne sait ce que c'est d'y avoir chaud; on passe d'un lieu à l'autre sans avoir presse nulle part. Un jeu de reversi donne la forme, et fixe tout. Le roi est auprès de madame de Montespan, qui tient la carte; monsieur, la reine, et madame de Soubise, Dangeau et compagnie, Langlée et compagnie. Mille louis sont répandus sur le tapis. Il n'y a point d'autres jetons. Je voyois Dangeau, et j'admirois combien nous

The visit that madame de Grignan paid her mother, soon after, was an unlucky one. She fell into a bad state of health. The anxiety her mother evinced augmented her illness. It was deemed necessary to separate mother and daughter. Corbinelli writes, "It was a cascade of terror; the reverberation was fatal to all three; the circle was mortal." Madame de Grignan returned to 1677. Ætat. 51.

sommes sots au jeu auprès de lui. Il ne songe qu'à son affaire, et gagne où les autres perdent: il ne néglige rien, il profite de tout; il n'est point distrait: en un mot, sa bonne conduite défie la fortune; aussi les deux cent mille francs en deux jours, les cent mille écus en un mois, tout cela se met sur le livre de sa recette. Il dit que je prenois part à son jeu, de sorte que je fus assise très-agréablement et très-commodément. Je saluai le roi, ainsi que vous me l'avez appris: il me rendit mon salut, comme si j'avois été jeune et belle. La reine me parla aussi long-temps de ma maladie que si c'eût été une couche. M. le duc me fit mille de ces caresses, à quoi il ne pense pas. Le maréchal de Lorges m'attaqua sous le nom du chevalier de Grignan, enfin *tutti quanti*. Vous savez ce que c'est que de recevoir un mot de tout ce que l'on trouve en son chemin. Madame de Montespan me parla de Bourbon: elle me pria de lui conter Vichi, et comment je m'en étois portée. Elle me dit que Bourbon, au lieu de guérir un genou, lui a fait mal aux deux. Je lui trouvai le dos bien plat, comme disoit la maréchale de la Meilleraie; mais sérieusement, c'est une chose surprenante que sa beauté; sa taille n'est pas la moitié si grosse qu'elle étoit, sans que son teint, ni ses yeux, ni ses lèvres en sont moins bien. Elle étoit habillée de point de France, coiffée de mille boucles: les deux des tempes lui tombent fort bas sur les joues; des rubans noirs à sa tète, des perles de la maréchale d'Hôpital, embellies de boucles et de pendeloques de diamans de la dernière beauté, trois ou quatre poinçons, point de coiffe; en un mot, une triomphante beauté, à faire admirer tous les ambassadeurs. Elle a su qu'on se plaignoit qu'elle empêchoit à toute la France de voir le roi; elle l'a redonné, comme vous voyez; et vous ne sauriez croire la joie que tout le monde en a, ni de quelle beauté cela rend la cour. Cette agréable confusion, sans confusion, de tout ce qu'il y a de plus choisi, dure depuis trois heures jusqu'à six. S'il vient des courriers, le roi se retire un moment pour lire ses lettres, puis revient. Il y a toujours quelque musique qu'il écoute, et qui fait un très-bon effet. Il cause avec les dames qui ont accoutumé d'avoir cet honneur. Enfin, on quitte le jeu à six heures. On n'a point du tout de peine à faire les comptes—il n'y a point de jetons ni de marques. Les poules sont au moins de cinq, six, à sept cent louis, les grosses de mille, de douze cents. On parle sans cesse, et rien ne demeure sur le cœur. Combien avez-vous de cœurs? J'en ai deux, j'en ai trois, j'en ai un, j'en ai quatre: il n'en a donc que trois, que quatre; et Dangeau est ravi de tout ce caquet: il découvre le jeu, il tire ses conséquences, il voit à qui il a affaire; enfin, j'étois bien aise de voir cet excès d'habilité: vraiment c'est bien lui qui sait le dessous des cartes. On monte donc à six heures en calèches, le roi, madame de Montespan, M. et madame de Thianges, et la bonne d'Hendicourt sur le strapontin, c'est-à-dire comme en paradis, ou dans la gloire de Niquée. Vous savez comme ces calèches sont faites: on ne se regarde point, on est tourné du même côté. La reine étoit dans une autre avec les princesses, et ensuite tout le monde attroupé selon sa fantaisie. On va sur le canal dans des gondoles; on trouve de la musique; on revient à dix heures, on trouve la comédie; minuit sonne, on fait *media noche*. Voilà comme se passe le samedi. De vous dire combien de fois on me parla de vous, combien on me fit de questions sans attendre la réponse, combien j'en épargnai, combien on s'en soucie peu, combien je m'en souciois encore moins, vous reconnoîtrez au naturel *l'iniqua corte*. Cependant il ne fut jamais si agréable, et on souhaite fort que cela continue."

Provence. This was a severe blow to madame de Sévigné. Her daughter wrote to her, "I was the disorder of your mind, your health, your house. I am good for nothing to you." To this, and to the reproaches she heard that her solicitude had augmented madame de Grignan's illness, madame de Sévigné replies, "To behold you, then, perish before my eyes was a trifle unworthy of my attention? When you were in good health, did I disquiet myself about the future? did I think of it? But I saw you ill, and of an illness perilous to the young; and, instead of trying to console me by a conduct that would have restored you to your usual health, absence was suggested. I kill you! I am the cause of all your sufferings! When I think of how I concealed my fears, and that the little that escaped me produced such frightful effects, I conclude that I am not allowed to love you; and, since such monstrous and impossible things are asked of me, my only resource is in your recovery." For some years after this madame de Grignan was in a delicate state of health. "Ah!" writes her mother, "how happy I was when I had no fears for your health! Of what had I then to complain, compared to my present inquietude?" However, though still delicate, she revisited Paris in the following month of November—it being considered advantageous for her family affairs,—and remained nearly two years. Her mother had taken a large mansion, the Hôtel de Carnavalet, and they resided under the same roof. There was a numerous family, and chief among them was a brother of M. de Grignan. The chevalier de Grignan enjoyed a great reputation for bravery and military conduct. He was a martyr to rheumatic gout, which often stood in the way of his active service; but he was always favoured by the king, and regarded by every one, as a man of superior abilities, and of a resolute and fearless mind. When six men of quality were selected to attend on the dauphin, under the name of *Menins*, he was named one of them. Two of M. de Grignan's daughters also accompanied them. They were the chil-

dren of his former marriage with Angélique d'Angennes, sister of the celebrated madame de Montauzier. Cardinal de Retz died in the August of this year. "Pity me, my cousin," madame de Sévigné writes to the count de Bussy, "for having lost cardinal de Retz. You know how amiable he was, and worthy the esteem of all who knew him. I was a friend of thirty years' standing, and ever received the tenderest marks of his friendship, which was equally honourable and delightful to me. Eight days' uninterrupted fever carried him off. I am grieved to the bottom of my heart."

1679. Ætat. 53.

At length, in the month of September, madame de Grignan returned to Provence. Her mother writes, "Do not tell me that I have no cause to regret you: I have, indeed, every cause. I know not what you have taken into your head. For myself, I remember only your friendship, your care, your kindness, your caresses. I have lost all these: I regret them; and nothing in the world can efface the recollection, nor console me for my loss." M. de Sévigné was at this time in Britany, and was elected deputy, by the nobles, to attend on the governor. "The title of new comer," writes his mother, "renders him important, and causes him to be mixed up in every thing. I hope he will marry: he will never again be so considerable. He has spent ten years at court and in the camp. The first year of peace he gives to his country. He can never be looked on so favourably as this year." Unfortunately, he deranged all these schemes by falling in love inopportunely; and he lingered in Britany, grasping all the money he could, felling trees, and squandering the proceeds without use or pleasure, while his mother awaited his return anxiously, and bore the blame of his absence, as it was supposed that he was detained by business of hers. The time when he could settle was not come. He was of that disposition which is not unfrequent among men. Gifted with vivacity, wit, and good humour, agreeable and gay, it appeared, as madame de Sévigné said, that he was exactly fitted for the situation at court, which, as lieutenant

of the dauphin's company of gendarmes, he naturally filled. But he was discontented: the restraint annoyed him; pleasure palled on him; he was eager to sell out, to bury himself in his province. One reason was that he was not regarded with an eye of favour by the king. Madame de Sévigné herself felt this disfavour, arising from her having been of the party of the fronde, a friend of Fouquet, and, lastly, a jansenist.

1680. Ætat. 54. During this year madame de Sévigné again, as she said, for the last time, to wind up all accounts, visited Britany. Her letters become more agreeable than ever; her affection for her daughter even increasing: her advice about her grandchildren*; her annoyance with regard to her son; is the interior portion of the story to which we are admitted. The news of the court is mentioned, and the progress of madame de Maintenon's favour, so puzzling to the courtiers; and, lastly, the picture of the provincial court of the duke and duchess de Chaulnes, who had the government of Britany. She describes their guards, their suite of provincial nobles, with their wives and daughters; and a little discontent creeps out, as it sometimes does, with regard to the court, that she had never risen above a private station. "I have seen you in Provence," she writes to her daughter, "surrounded by as many ladies, and M. de Grignan followed by as many men, of quality, and receive, at Lambesc, with as much dignity, as M. de Chaulnes can here. I reflected that you held your court there; I come to pay mine here: thus has Providence ordered." She enjoyed, however, the dinners, suppers, and festivals of the duke, who made much of her; and her anecdotes

* It is curious to find her earnestly recommending maternal affection to her daughter. One poor little girl was wholly sacrificed—shut up in a convent, waiting for a vocation; the other was saved by her grandmother from a similar fate. She writes, "Mais parlons de cette Pauline; l'aimable, la jolie petite créature! Ai-je jamais été si jolie qu'elle? on dit que je l'étois beaucoup. Je suis ravie qu'elle vous fasse souvenir de moi: je sais bien qu'il n'est pas besoin de cela; mais, enfin, j'ai une joie sensible: vous me la dépeignez charmante, et je crois précisément tout ce que vous me dites: je suis étonnée qu'elle ne soit devenue sotte et ricaneuse dans ce couvent: ah, que vous avez fait bien de l'en retirer! Gardez-la, ma fille, ne vous privez pas de ce plaisir; la Providence en aura soin."—Oct. 4. 1679. In another letter she says, "Aimez, *aimez* Pauline; croyez-moi, tâtez, tâtez de l'amour maternel."

are full of vivacity. Her eyes never rest: they see all: sometimes a grace, sometimes a folly; now a *bon mot*, now a stupidity, salutes her eyes or ears: it is all transmitted to her daughter; and we, at this distance of time and place, enjoy the accounts, which, being true to human nature, often seem as fresh and *à propos* as if they had occurred yesterday. And then she quits all, and writes, "I am at length in the quiet of my woods, and in that state of abstinence and silence for which I longed." And she plunges into the depths of jansenism, and discusses the knotty subject of the grace of God.*

On her return to the capital, she was made perfectly happy by the arrival of her daughter, in better health than she had been for a long time, and who remained in Paris for several years. Her son, also, whose youthful follies had cost her many a pang, made an advantageous marriage. She writes to the count de Bussy, 1684.
"After much trouble, I at last marry my poor boy. Ætat.
One must never despair of good luck. I feared that 58.
my son could no longer hope for a good match, after so many storms and wrecks, without employment or opening for fortune; and, while I was engaged in these sorrowful thoughts, Providence brought about a marriage, so advantageous that I could not have desired a better when my son's hopes were highest. It is thus that we walk blindly, taking for bad that which is good, and for good that which is bad, and always in utter ignorance." M. de Sévigné married Jeanne-Marguerite

* It is in these letters from her *château* that we find her penetration into the human heart, and her sympathy with all that is upright and good. She writes to her daughter, "Vous verrez comme tous les vices et toutes les vertus sont jetés pêle-mêle dans le fond de ces provinces; car je trouve des âmes de paysans plus droites que les lignes, aimant la vertu comme naturellement les chevaux trottent." As to her jansenism, it was very sincere, though not mingled with the spirit of party. She believed in the election of grace, and the few that were to be saved; and, though somewhat puzzled when she tried to reconcile this doctrine with the free will of man, she has recourse to St. Augustin, the jansenian saint, and says, "Lisez un peu le livre de la prédestination des saints de St. Augustin, et du don de la persévérance: je ne cherche pas à être davantage éclaircie sur ce point; et je veux me tenir, si je puis, dans l'humilité et dans la dépendance. Le onzième chapitre du don de la persévérance me tomba hier sous la main: lisez-le, et lisez tout le livre: c'est où j'ai puisé mes erreurs: je ne suis pas seule, cela me console; et en vérité je suis tentée à croire qu'on ne dispute aujourd'hui sur cet matière avec tant de chaleur, que faute de s'entendre."

de Brehaut de Mauron, an amiable and virtuous woman, whose gentleness, and common sense, and turn for piety, joined to a caressing and playful disposition, suited admirably both mother and son. In the autumn of this year she visited the new married pair at the Rochers. It was a sad blow to her to quit Paris, where her daughter was residing. Motives of economy, or, rather, the juster motive of paying her debts, enforced this exile, which was hard to bear. We read her letters for the variety of amusement and instruction we find in them; and, as we read, we are struck by the change of tone that creeps over them. From the period of this long visit of eight years, which madame de Grignan paid to Paris, we find the most perfect and unreserved friendship subsisting between mother and daughter. Their ages agree better: the one, now forty, understands the other, who is sixty, better than the young woman of twenty did her of forty. Other interests, also, had risen for madame de Grignan in her children. Her anxiety for her son's advancement was fully shared by madame de Sévigné. A more sober, perhaps a less amusing, but certainly a far more interesting (if we may make this distinction), tone pervades the later letters. Her daughter, before, was the affection that weaned her from the world; now it mingled with higher and better thoughts. The Rochers were more peaceful than ever. Her son had not good health: his wife was cheerful only at intervals: she was delicate; she never went out: by nine in the evening her strength was exhausted, and she retired, leaving madame de Sévigné to her letters. She was gentle and kind withal; attentive, without putting herself forward; so that her mother-in-law never felt that there was another mistress in the house, though all her comforts were attended to sedulously.

We pause too long over these minutia. We turn over madame de Sévigné's pages: an expression, a detail strikes us; we are impelled to put it down; but the memoir grows too long, and we must curtail. She returned to Paris in August, 1685, and enjoyed for three

years more the society of her daughter. During this 1687. Ætat. 61.
period she lost her uncle, the abbé de Coulanges. "You know that I was under infinite obligations to him," she writes to count de Bussy: "I owed him the agreeableness and repose of my life; and you owed to him the gladness that I brought to your society: without him we had never laughed together. You owe to him my gaiety, my good humour, my vivacity; the gift I had of understanding you; the ability of comprehending what you had said, and of guessing what you were going to say. In a word, the good abbé, by drawing me from the gulf in which M. de Sévigné had left me, rendered me what I was, what you knew me, and worthy of your esteem and friendship. I draw the curtain before the wrong you did me: it was great, but must be forgotten; and I must tell you that I have felt deeply the loss of this dear source of the peace of my whole life. He lived with honour, and died as a christian. God give us the same grace! It was at the end of August that I wept him bitterly. I should never have left him, had he lived as long as myself."

The subsequent separation of mother and daughter 1688. Ætat. 62.
renewed the correspondence. This division lasted only a year and a half, when madame de Sévigné repaired to Grignan, which she did not quit again. The letters written during these few months are very numerous and long. The growing charms and talents of Pauline de Grignan; the *début* of the young marquis de Grignan, who began his career at sixteen in the siege of Philisburg; and the deep interest felt by both, is the first subject. The arrival of James II. in France, and the court news, which had the novelty of the English royal family being established at St. Germain, fills many of the letters. The account of the acting of Esther*, which

* "Je fis ma cour l'autre jour à St. Cyr, plus agréablement que je n'eusse jamais pensé. Nous y allâmes samedi; madame de Coulanges, madame de Bagnols, l'abbé Têtu, et moi: nous trouvâmes nos places gardées; un officier dit à madame de Coulanges que madame de Maintenon lui faisoit garder un siège auprès d'elle: vous voyez quel honneur! 'Pour vous, madame,' me dit-il, 'vous pouvez choisir.' Je me mis avec madame deBagnols, au second banc derrière les duchesses. Le maréchal de Bellefond vint se mettre par

enlivened the royal pleasures; and her *naïve* delight at having been spoken to by the king is one of her most agreeable passages. Added to this pleasure was that of M. de Grignan receiving the order of the *saint esprit*. Soon after she repaired to Britany, where her time was spent partly at Rennes, with the duchess de Chaulnes, partly at the Rochers. Her absence from Paris was felt bitterly by her friends: her motive, the payment of her debts, was, however, appreciated and applauded; and she was at once mortified and gratified by the offer of a loan of money to facilitate her return. Madame de la Fayette wrote to make her the proposition; but the money was to come from her kind friend the duchess de Chaulnes. The proposal was made with some *brusquerie*: "You must not, my dear, at any price whatever, pass the winter in Britany. You are old; the Rochers are thickly wooded; catarrhs and colds will destroy you; you will get weary; your mind will be-

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choix à mon côté droit. Nous écoutâmes, le maréchal et moi, cette tragédie avec une attention qui fut remarqué; et de certaines louanges sourdes et bien placées. Je ne puis vous dire l'excès de l'agrément de cette pièce. C'est une chose qui n'est pas aisée à représenter, et qui ne sera jamais imitée. C'est un rapport de la musique, des vers, des chants, et des personnes si parfait, qu'on n'y souhaite rien. On est attentif, et l'on n'a point d'autre peine que celle de voir finir une si aimable tragédie. Tout y est simple, tout y est innocent, tout y est sublime et touchant. Cette fidélité à l'histoire sainte donne du respect: tous les chants convenables aux paroles sont d'une beauté singulière. La mesure de l'approbation qu'on donne à cette pièce, c'est celle du goût et de l'attention. J'en fus charmée et le maréchal aussi, qui sortit de sa place pour aller dire au roi combien il étoit content, et qu'il étoit auprès d'une dame qui étoit bien digne d'avoir vu Esther. Le roi vint vers nos places; et après avoir tourné, il s'adressa à moi, et me dit, 'Madame, je suis assuré que vous avez été contente.' Moi, sans m'étonner, je repondis, 'Sire, je suis charmée, ce que je sens est au dessus des paroles.' Le roi me dit, 'Racine a bien de l'esprit.' Je lui dit, 'Sire, il en a beaucoup, mais en vérité ces jeunes personnes en ont beaucoup aussi; elles entrent dans le sujet, comme si elles n'avoient jamais fait autre chose.' 'Ah, pour cela,' reprit-il, 'il est vrai;' et puis sa majesté s'en alla, et me laissa l'objet d'envie: comme il n'y avoit quasi que moi de nouvelle venue, il eut quelque plaisir de voir mes sincères admirations, sans bruit et sans éclat. M. le prince, madame la princesse, me vinrent dire un mot, madame de Maintenon, elle s'en alloit avec le roi. Je répondit à tout, car j'étois en fortune. Nous revinmes le soir aux flambeaux; je soupai chez madame de Coulanges, à qui le roi avoit parlé aussi, avec un air d'être chez lui, qui lui donnoit une douceur trop aimable. Je vis le soir M. le chevalier de Grignan. Je lui contait tout naïvement un éclair mes petites prospérités, ne voulant point les cachoter sans savoir pourquoi, comme certaines personnes. Il en fut content, et voilà qui est fait. Je suis assurée qu'il ne m'a point trouvé dans la suite, ni une sotte vanité, ni un transport de bourgeoise."

come sad and lose its tone: this is certain; and all the business in the world is nothing in comparison. Do not speak of money nor of debts, I am to put an end to all that;" and then follows a proposition for her to take up her abode at the Hôtel de Chaulnes, and of the loan of a thousand crowns. "No arguments," the letter continues, "no words, no useless correspondence. You must come. I will not even read what you may write. In a word, you consent, or renounce the affection of your dearest friends. We do not choose that a friend shall grow old and die through her own fault." This tone of command gave pleasure to madame de Sévigné, though she at once refused to lay herself under the obligation. But there was a sting in the letter which she passed over; madame de Grignan discovered it, and her mother allowed that she felt it; and writes, "You were, then, struck by madame de la Fayette's expression, mingled with so much kindness. Although I never allow myself to forget this truth, I confess I was quite surprised, for as yet I feel no decay to remind me: however, I often reflect and calculate, and find the conditions on which we enjoy life very hard. It seems to me that I was dragged, in spite of myself, to the fatal term when one must suffer old age. I see it, — am there. I should, at least, like to go no further in the road of decrepitude, pain, loss of memory, and disfigurement, which are at hand to injure me. I hear a voice that says, even against your will you must go on; or, if you refuse, you must die; which is another necessity from which nature shrinks. Such is the fate of those who go a little too far. But a return to the will of God, and the universal law by which we are condemned, brings one to reason, and renders one patient."

As madame de Sévigné was resolved to give up her Parisian life, for the admirable motive of paying her debts before she died, she felt that the only compensation she could receive was residing at Grignan. Madame de la Fayette, on hearing of her intention of going thither, writes, "Your friends are content that you

should go to Provence, since you will not return to
Paris. The climate is better; you will have society,
even when madame de Grignan is away; there is a
good mansion, plenty of inhabitants; in short, it is
being alive to live there; and I applaud your son for
1690. consenting to lose you, for your own sake." On the
Ætat. 3d of October, therefore, she set off; and friendship,
64. as she says, rendering so long a journey easy, she
arrived on the 24th; when madame de Grignan received
her with open arms, and with such joy, affection, and
gratitude, "that," she says, "I found I had not
come soon enough nor far enough." From this time
the correspondence with her daughter entirely ceases.
The letters that remain to her other friends scarcely fill
up the gap. She visited Paris once again with her
daughter; but her time was chiefly spent at Grignan.
1694. She witnessed the establishment of her grandchildren.
Ætat. The marriage of the young marquis de Grignan was, of
68. course, a deeply interesting subject; nor was she less
pleased when Pauline, whom she had served so well in
1695. her advice to her mother, married, at the close of the
Ætat. following year, the marquis de Simiane. Early in the
69. spring of 1696 madame de Grignan was attacked by a
dangerous and lingering illness. Her mother attended on
her with tenderness and zeal; but she felt her strength fail
her. She wrote to her friends, that, if her daughter did
not soon recover, she must sink under her fatigues, —
1696. words that proved too fatally true. After a sudden and
Ætat. short illness, she died, in April of the same year, at the
70. age of seventy. The blow of her death was severely
felt by her friends, — a gap was made in their lives,
never to be filled up.

In describing her character, her malicious cousin, count de Bussy, darkens many traits, which, in their natural colouring, only rendered her the more agreeable. He blames her for being carried away by a love of the agreeable rather than the solid; but he allows, at the same time, that there was not a cleverer woman in France; that her manners were vivacious and divert-

ing, though she was a little too sprightly for a woman of quality. Madame de la Fayette addressed a portrait to her, as was the fashion of those times. Madame de Sévigné was three-and-thirty when it was written. It is, of course, laudatory: it speaks of the charms of her society, when all constraint was banished from the conversation; and says that the brilliancy of her wit imparted so bright a tinge to her cheek, and sparkle to her eye, that, while others pleased the ears, she dazzled the eyes of her listeners; so that she surpassed, for the moment, the most perfect beauty. The portrait speaks of the affectionate emotions of her heart, and of her love of all that was pleasing and agreeable. "Joy is the natural atmosphere of your soul," it says; "and annoyance is more displeasing to you than to any other." It mentions her obliging disposition, and the grace with which she obliged; her admirable conduct, her frankness, her sweetness.

Of course fault has been found with her. In the first place, Voltaire says, after praising her letters, "It is a pity that she was absolutely devoid of taste; that she did not do Racine justice; and that she puts Mascaron's funeral oration on Turenne on a par with the *chef-d'œuvre* of Fléchier." We need not say much concerning the first of these accusations. It may be thought that madame de Sévigné showed good taste in her criticisms on Racine. The truth was that, accustomed to Corneille in her youth, she adhered to his party, and was faithful to tastes associated with her happiest days. Of the second, we must mention that she heard Mascaron's oration delivered: and the effect of delivery is often to dazzle, and to inspire a false judgment. She wrote to her daughter on the spur of the moment; and her opinion had no pretensions to a criticism meant for posterity. Afterwards, when she read Fléchier's oration at leisure, she did not hesitate to prefer it. She is a little inclined to a false and flowery style in her choice of books; but her letters exonerate

her from the charge of too vehement an admiration for such, or they would not be, as they are, models for grace, ease, and nature.

Another accusation brought against her is, that she was a little malicious in her mode of speaking of persons. It is strange how people can find dark spots in the sun: for, as that luminary is indeed conspicuous for its universal light, and not for its partial darkness, so madame de Sévigné's letters are remarkable for their absence of ill-nature; and, when we reflect with what unreserve and pouring out of the heart they were written, we admire the more the gentle and kindly tone that pervades the whole. "There is a person here," she writes to her daughter, of her uncle, the abbé de Coulanges, "who is so afraid of misdirecting his letters after they are written, that he folds them and puts the addresses before he writes them." The spirit of hyper-criticism alone could discover ill-nature in the quick sense for the ludicrous that the mention of this most innocuous piece of caution displays. In a few of her letters we find her record with pleasure some ill-natured treatment of a certain lady; but this lady had calumniated madame de Grignan, and so drawn on herself the mother's heaviest displeasure.

The last fault brought against her is her being dazzled by greatness:—her saying to her cousin, Bussy, after Louis XIV. had danced with her, "We must allow that he is a great king," which, as a frondeuse, she was at that time bound to deny: but he *was* a great king, and posterity may therefore forgive her. She made no sacrifices to greatness, and was guilty of no truckling. She allows she should have liked a court life. She traces her exclusion from it to her alliance with the fronde, her friendship for Fouquet, and her jansenist opinions; but she never repines; and this is the more praiseworthy, with regard to her jansenism, since she only adhered to it from entertaining the opinions which received that name, not from party spirit; and

had not, therefore, the support and sympathy of the party. She revered the virtues of their leaders; but there was nothing either bigotted or controversial in her admiration or piety.

The only reproach that madame de Sévigné at all deserves is her approval of the revocation of the edict of Nantes, the stain and disgrace of Louis XIV.'s reign, which banished from his country his best and most industrious subjects. We blame Philip III. for extirpating the Moriscos from Spain; but they, at least, were of a different race, and a gulf of separation subsisted between them and the Spaniards. The huguenots were the undoubted and native subjects of the kingdom: the times, also, were more enlightened and refined; and our contempt is the more raised when we find Louis the dupe of two ministers, Le Tellier and Louvois, who were influenced by their hatred of Colbert, one of the greatest and most enlightened ministers of France. We cannot but believe that the French revolution had worn a different aspect had the huguenots remained in France, and, as a consequence, the population had been held in less ignorance and barbarism. We cannot believe that madame de Sévigné really approved the atrocities that ensued. As a good jansenist, she was bound to detest forced conversions. Much of her praise, no doubt, was foisted in from fear that her letters might be opened at the post and read by officials; and it may be remembered, that M. de Grignan had evinced a suspicion that her jansenism had impeded the advancement of his family, as it certainly had of her own. She was at a distance, too, from the scene of action: still she says too much; and cannot be excused, except on the plea that she knew not what she did.*

* "Le père Bourdaloue s'en va, par ordre du roi, prêcher à Montpelier, et dans ces provinces où tant de gens se sont convertis sans savoir pourquoi. Le père Bourdaloue le leur apprendra, et en fera de bons catholiques. Les dragons ont été de très-bons missionnaires jusqu'ici: les médiateurs qu'on envoient présentement rendront l'ouvrage parfait. Vous aurez vu, sans doute, l'édit par lequel le roi révoque celui de Nantes. Rien n'est si beau que tout ce qu'il contient, et jamais aucun roi n'a fait et ne fera rien de plus mémorable."—Lettre au comte de Bussy, 14 Nov. 1685. The count replies, "J'admire la conduite du roi pour ruiner les huguenots: les

The question has been asked, "In what does madame de Sévigné's merit consist? Did she show herself above her age?" La Harpe says, in his panegyric, "Even those who love this extraordinary woman do not sufficiently estimate the superiority of her understanding. I find in her every species of talent: argumentative or frivolous, witty or sublime, she adopts every tone with wonderful facility." To the question, however, of whether she was superior to her age, we answer, at once, no; but she was equal to the best and highest portion of it. We pass in review before us the greatest men of that day — the most profound thinkers, the most virtuous,—Pascal, Rochefoucauld, Racine, Boileau. Her opinions and sentiments were as liberal and enlightened as theirs; and that is surely sufficient praise for a woman absolutely without pretensions; and who, while she bares the innermost depths of her mind to her daughter, had no thought of dressing and educating that mind for posterity.

The race of madame de Sévigné is extinct. Her son continued childless. The marquis de Grignan died also without offspring. He died young, of the small-pox; and his broken-hearted mother soon followed him to the tomb. Pauline, marquise de Simiane, left children, who became allied to the family of Créqui; but that, also, is now extinct.

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guerres qu'on leur a faites autrefois, et les Saints Barthélémis, ont multiplié et donné vigeur à cette secte. Sa majesté l'a sapée petit à petit, et l'édit qu'il vient de donner, soutenu des dragons et des Bourdaloues, a été le coup de grace.

BOILEAU.

1636—1711.

One of the authors most characteristic of the better part of the age of Louis XIV. was Boileau. The activity and directness of his mind, his fastidious taste, his wit, the strict propriety of his writings, and their useful aim, were worthy of a period which, for many years, legislated for the republic of letters. Sunk in ignorance as France had been, it required spirits as resolute and enlightened as his to refine it, and spread knowledge widely abroad — while his disposition and habits were honourable to himself, and to the society of which he formed a distinguished part.

The father of the poet, Giles Boileau, was for sixty years *greffier* to the great chamber of the parliament of Paris. The simplicity of his character, his abilities, and probity, caused him to be universally esteemed. He had a large family. Three of his sons distinguished themselves in literature. One, who took the name of Pui-Morin, was a lawyer; but his publications were rather classic than legal. Another entered the church; he became a doctor of Sorbonne, and enjoyed several ecclesiastical preferments.

Nicholas Boileau (who, to distinguish him from his brothers, was called by his contemporaries Despréaux, from some meadows which his father possessed at the end of his garden,) was born in Paris, on the 5th of December, 1636.* He lost his mother when he was

* The place of his birth and the date have been disputed. Critics have decided on the facts above given. The doubt partly originated in Boileau himself. Louis XIV. one day asked him his age; he replied, "I came into the world a year before your majesty, that I might announce the glories of your reign." The reply pleased the king, and was applauded by the courtiers; nor did Boileau err much in the fact; for, being born as late in the year as December, he was scarcely more than a year older than the king, though the date of that monarch's birth was 1638.

only eleven months old — she dying at the early age of twenty-three. His childhood was one of suffering; so that he said of himself, in after times, that he would not accept a new life on the condition of passing through a similar childhood. We are not told what the evils were of which he complained, but they were certainly, to a great degree, physical; for he was cut for the stone at an early age, and the operation being badly performed he never entirely regained his health. His earliest years were spent at the village of Crone, in which his father had a country house, where he spent his law vacations, and where, indeed, Louis Racine declares that Nicholas was born. The house must have been small and humble, for the boy was lodged in a loft above a barn, till a little room was constructed for him in the barn itself, which made him say that he commenced life by descending into a barn. His disposition as a child was marked by a simplicity and kindliness, that caused his father to say, "that Colin was a good fellow, who would never speak ill of any one." His turn for satire made this seem ridiculous in after times: yet it was founded on truth. Delicacy, and a sort of irritability of taste, joined to wit, caused him to satirise writers: but he carefully abstained from impugning the private character of any one; and, with his friends, and in his conduct during life, he was remarkable for probity, kindness of heart, and a cordial forgiving disposition. When we view him as a courtier, also, we recognize at once that independence of feeling, joined to a certain absence of mind, of which his father perceived the germ.

He went to school at Beauvais; and M. Sevin, master of one of the classes, discovered his taste for poetry, and asserted that he would acquire great reputation in his future life; being persuaded that, when a man is born a poet, nothing can prevent him from fulfilling his destiny. Boileau was at this time passionately fond of romances and poetry; but his critical taste was awakened by these very pursuits. "Even at fifteen," he says, in his ninth satire, "I detested a stupid book. Satire

opened for me the right path, and supported my steps towards the Parnassus where I ventured to seek her." At the age of eighteen he wrote an ode on the war which it was expected that Cromwell would declare against France. In later days he corrected this ode, and added to the force of its expressions; but even in its original state it is remarkable for the purity of its language, its conciseness, and energy.

At the age of sixteen he lost his father, and thus acquired early that independent position which is the portion of orphans. His relations wished him to follow the profession of the law: he consented, and, applying himself with diligence, was named advocate at an early age. But the chicanery, the tortuousness, and absurdity 1656.
of the practice speedily disgusted him, formed as he was Ætat.
by nature to detect and expose error; so that, in the very 20.
first cause entrusted to him, he showed so much disgust, that the attorney (who probably was aware that such existed), fancying that he had discovered some irregularity in his proceedings, said, on withdrawing his brief, "Ce jeune avocat ira loin." Boileau, on the contrary, was only eager to throw off the burden of a profession so little suited to him; and he quitted the bar for the study of ecclesiastical polity, fancying that religion would purify and elevate the practice of the church. He was soon undeceived; and was shocked and astonished by the barbarous language, the narrow scholastic speculations, and polemical spirit, of the sorbonne. He found that chicanery had but changed its garb; and, unwilling to debase his mind by such studies, he gave them up, and dedicated himself entirely to literature. Led by his inborn genius, he boldly entered on the career of letters and poetry, in spite of the warnings of his family *, for

* Que si quelqu'un, mes Vers, alors vous importune,
Pour savoir mes parens, ma vie, et ma fortune,
Contez lui qu'allié d'assez hauts magistrats,
Fils d'un greffier, né d'ayeux avocats,
Dès le berçeau perdant une forte jeune mère,
Reduit seize ans après à pleurer mon vieux père,
J'allai d'un pas hardi, par moi-même guidé,
Et de mon seul génie en marchant secondé,

his patrimony, consisting only of a few thousand crowns, seemed to render it imperative that he should follow a gainful profession. His desires, however, were moderate; and he contrived to limit his expenses to his slender income.

Literature and knowledge were at a low ebb in France when Louis XIV. began to reign. The genius of the people had, previously to Corneille, displayed itself in no great national poem. Its instincts for poetry, owing, perhaps, to the faulty nature of the language, had confined itself to songs and ballads, inimitable for a certain charming elegant simplicity, but with no pretension to the praise due to a high order of imagination. Corneille, in his majesty and power, stood alone. Then had come Molière, who detected and held up to ridicule the false taste of the age. Yet, in spite of his attacks, this false taste in part subsisted; and there were several of the favourite authors of the day whose works excited Boileau's spleen, and roused him to the task of satire. Chapelain may be mentioned as the chief among them. Jean Chapelain was a Parisian, and a member of the French academy. He was much patronised by the minister Colbert; and, under his auspices, the king not only granted him a pension, but entrusted to his care the making out a list of the chief literary men of Europe, towards whom Louis, in a spirit of just munificence, inspired by Colbert, allowed pensions, in token that their labours deserved assistance or reward. Jean Chapelain, an upright, a clever, and a generous man, was thus exalted to the head of the republic of letters; and was seduced by the voice of praise to write a poem on the subject of the Maid of Orleans. The topic was popular: while in progress, Chapelain enjoyed an anticipated reputation on the strength of it; and the duke de Longueville allowed him a pension; but as soon as the "Pucelle" was published,

Studieux amateur de Perse et d'Horace,
Assez pres de Regnier m'asseoir sur le Parnasse. — Epître X.
La famille en pâlit, et vit en fremissant,
Dans la poudre du greffier un poëte naissant. — Epître V.

which rash act he did not venture on for a number of years, his fame as a poet fell to the ground; epigrams rained on the unfortunate epic, and Boileau brought up the rear with pointed well-turned sarcasms. As the friend of Colbert, as an amiable man of acknowledged talents, Chapelain had many partisans. The duke de Montauzier *, a satirist himself in his youth, was furious, and declared that Boileau ought to be tossed into the river, that he might rhyme there. Other friends of Chapelain remonstrated; but their representations turned to the amusement of the satirist. "Chapelain is my friend," said the abbé de la Victoire, "and I grieve that you have named him in your satires. It is true, if he followed my advice, he would not write poetry; prose suits him much better."—"And what more do I say?" cried Boileau: "I repeat in verse what every one else says in prose: I am, in truth, the secretary of the public." †

As such the public joyfully accepted him. He became the favourite guest of the best society in Paris, where genius and wit were honoured. Joined to his faculty of writing satires, whose every word was as a gem set in gold, Boileau read his verses well, and possessed the talent of mimicry, which added greatly to the zest of his recitations. Chapelain, Cotin, and the poetasters

* The duc de Montauzier married Julie d'Angennes, demoiselle de Rambouillet—the deity of the clique which established the system of factitious gallantry which Molière and Boileau ridiculed and exploded. Of course the duke was inimically inclined; but time softened the exasperation, and Boileau, by apt flattery in his epistle to Racine, completed the change. Soon after the publication of this epistle, the peer and poet met in the galleries of Versailles, and exchanged compliments; the duke took the satirist home to dine with him, and was his friend ever after.

† The following is a specimen of the poetry of the "Pucelle,"—the Maid of Orleans is addressing the king:—

"O! grand prince, que grand des cette heure j'appelle,
Il est vrai, le respect sert de bride à mon zèle:
Mais ton illustre aspect me redouble le cœur,
Et me le redoublant, me redouble la peur.
A ton illustre aspect mon cœur se sollicite,
Et grimpant contre mont, la dure terre quitte.
O! que n'ai-je le ton desormais assez fort
Pour aspirer à toi, sans te faire de tort.
Pour toi puissé-je avoir une mortelle pointe
Vers où l'épaule gauche à la gorge est conjointe,
Que le coup brisât l'os, et fit pleuvoir le sang
De la temple, du dos, de l'épaule, et du flanc.

whom he lashed, passed thus, as it were, in living array before his audience; and the enjoyment he created naturally led to a popularity, which, as it was bestowed by the well-born, the beautiful, and the rich, spread a halo of prosperity round the poet's steps.

Boileau, however, has not escaped censure for his personal attacks. It was considered a defilement of the elevated spirit of poetical satire to attack persons; and, though Boileau only lashed these men as authors, their blameless private characters made many recoil from seeing their names held up to ridicule. Not only his contemporaries, but later writers, have blamed him.* He has even been accused of acting from base motives. That Chapelain, when he made a list for Colbert of literary men deserving of pensions, did not include Boileau's name is supposed to be the occasion of his enmity. But the dislike seems to have had foundation earlier; for we are told that the first satire was composed when the poet was only four-and-twenty, and had no pretensions to be pensioned for unwritten works, and, indeed, before the pensions in question were granted.† Some ill blood might have arisen through a quarrel between Boileau and his elder brother Giles, who was a friend of Chapelain. This circumstance rendered him, perhaps, more willing to attack the latter; but, doubtless,

* Voltaire, in his "Mémoire sur la Satire," severely censures Boileau. Voltaire was peculiarly sensitive to satire, while he never spared it in his turn; he cherished a sort of reserve in his mind, that made it venial in him to attack with virulence, while no one was to censure him without the most cutting return. This fact, however, does not alter his argument. It is a difficult question. It may be said that it is impossible but that bad books should be criticised by contemporary writers, while all men of generous and liberal natures will be averse to undertaking the office of butcher themselves.

† The pensions were granted in 1663. Chapelain selected the names; but we can hardly believe that he wrote the list, such as it has come down to us, wherein the praise lavished on himself is ridiculous enough: The occasion of the pension is appended to the name: this is a specimen of some among them:—

"Au sieur Pierre Corneille, premier poëte dramatique du monde, deux mille francs.

"Au sieur Desmarets, le plus fertile auteur, et doué de la plus belle imagination qui ait jamais été, douze cents francs.

"Au sieur Molière, excellent poëte comique, mille francs.

"Au sieur Racine, poëte français, huit cents francs.

"Au sieur Chapelain, le plus grand poëte français qui ait jamais été, et du plus solide jugement, trois mille francs."

his ruling motive was his hatred of a bad book, and his natural genius, which directed the scope of his labours.

Boileau himself carefully distinguishes between attacks made on authors and on individuals; and, *à propos*, of his ridicule of Chapelain, he says,

> " En blamant ses ecrits, ai-je d'un style affreux
> Distilé sur sa vie un venin dangereux ?
> Ma muse en l'attaquant, charitable et discrete,
> Sçait de l'homme d'honneur distinguer le poëte."*

Still he whimsically gives, as it were, the lie to this very defence by his subsequent conduct; for, when any one of the unhappy authors whom he had held up to ridicule showed him personal kindness, he was not proof against the impulse that led him to expunge his name in the next edition of his works, and substitute that of some new-sprung enemy. Thus in the seventh satire we find the following persons strung together:—

> " Faut-il d'un froid Rimeur dépeindre la manie?'
> Mes vers, comme un torrent, coulent sur le papier,
> Je recontre à la fois Perrin et Pelletier,
> Bardou, Mauroy, Boursault, Colletet, Titreville."

He afterwards altered the last verse to

> " Bonnecorse, Pradon, Colletet, Titreville."

Perrin had translated the Æneid into French; and was the first person who obtained leave to introduce the Italian opera into France. Pelletier was a sort of itinerant rhymester, who, when he addressed a sonnet to a man, carried it to him, and contrived to get paid for his pains. Bardou and Mauroy were minor poets, whose nonsense appeared in ephemeral collections of verses. Boursault was more distinguished. He quarrelled with Molière, and endeavoured to satirise him in a slight drama, entitled " Portrait du Peintre, ou, contre Critique de l'Ecole des Femmes." Molière showed himself very indifferent to this sort of attack; but Boileau took up the cudgels for him. Boursault revenged himself by another drama, levelled against Boileau himself, called " Satire des Satires;" and the latter, with a

* Satire IX.

sensitiveness in which he had no right to indulge, got a decree of parliament to prevent its representation. Many years after, when Boileau was at the baths of Bourbon for his health, and Boursault was *receveur des termes* at Mont Luçon, a town not far distant, Boileau writes to Racine, "M. Boursault, whom I thought dead, came to see me five or six days ago, and made his appearance again unexpectedly this evening. He told me he had come three long leagues out of his way to Mont Luçon, whither he was bound, and where he lives, to have the pleasure of calling on me. He offered me all sorts of things — money, horses, &c. I replied by similar civilities, and wished to keep him till to-morrow to dinner; but he said he was obliged to go away early in the morning, and we separated the best possible friends." Racine says, in reply, "I am pleased by the civilities you have received from Boursault; you are advancing towards perfection at a prodigious pace; how many people you have pardoned." Boileau replies, "I laughed heartily at the joke you make of the people I have pardoned; but do you know that I have more merit than you imagine, if the Italian proverb be true, *chi offende non perdona*." About this time Pradon and Bonnecorse attacked him; and he took occasion, in a new edition of his works, to substitute their names for those of the persons with whom he was now reconciled.

To return to his younger days: wit, high and convivial spirits, and his acknowledged and popular talents, gained him the favour of the great. The great Condé was his especial protector; and he changed many expressions in his poems, and even altered them materially, at his suggestion. The great Condé often assembled literary men at Chantilly; and he liked this society far better than that of people of rank. One day, when Racine and Boileau were with him, the arrival of some bishop was announced, as having come to view his palace and grounds. "Show him every thing," said the prince impatiently, "except myself." This prince often discussed literary topics with his guests. When he was

in the right, he argued with moderation and gentleness; when in the wrong, he grew angry if contradicted: his eyes sparkled with a fire that even intimidated Boileau, who yielded at once, remarking, at the same time, to his neighbour, "Henceforth I shall always agree with the prince when he is in the wrong."

The First President Lamoignon also honoured him with his intimate friendship; and Arnaud and Nicole, churchmen distinguished for their virtues and talents, were among his dearest and most revered friends. But, besides these, he had intimates of his own station, of not less genius than himself; authors, yet without rivalship, who enjoyed the zest given by each other's wit in society; to whom he was strongly attached, and with whom, in the heyday of life, he played many a prank, and spent long hours of social enjoyment. Racine, La Fontaine, Molière, and Chapelle* were among these. Many anecdotes are told concerning them, which makes us the more regret that no faithful Boswell was near to glean more amply. The "Boileana," which pretended to record their wit, is by no means authentic. Louis Racine, in his valuable life of his father, has given us one or two; from these — the shadow rather than the light of wit — marking its place rather than displaying its form — we select a few.

This knot of friends frequently dined at a celebrated *traiteur's*, or at one another's houses; in particular, at Molière's and Boileau's country houses at Auteuil. The conversation on these occasions was brilliant; and, did a silly remark escape from any among them, a fine was immediately levied. Chapelain's poem of the "Pucelle" was on the table, and, according to the quality of the fault, the accused was adjudged to read a certain number of lines from this poem: twenty lines was a heavy punishment; a whole page was considered equivalent to a sentence of death.

The famous supper, when the whole company resolved to drown themselves, has been related in the life of

* For an account of Chapelle, see Life of Molière.

Molière. Buoyant spirits, unchecked by age or sorrow, inspired a thousand freaks, which were put in execution on the spur of the minute. At one time the university of Paris was going to present a petition to parliament to desire that the philosophy of Descartes should not be taught in the schools. This was mentioned before the First President Lamoignon, who said that, if the petition were presented, the decree could not be refused. Boileau, amused by the idea, wrote a burlesque decree, which he got up in common with Racine, and his nephew added the legal terms, and carried it, together with several other papers, to be signed by the president. Lamoignon was on the point of putting his name, when, casting his eyes over it, he exclaimed, "This is a trick of Despréaux!" The burlesque petition became known, and the university gave up the notion of presenting a serious one.

Meanwhile, flattered and courted by the great, and beloved by his friends, Boileau long abstained from publishing those satires which had gained him so much popularity. Many of his verses had passed into proverbs from their appositeness and felicity of expression *; and those who heard him recite were eager to learn them by heart, and repeat them to others. Becoming thus the universal subject of conversation, — listened to with delight, repeated with enthusiasm,—the booksellers laid hold of mutilated copies, and printed them. The

* In one of his later poems, Boileau, addressing his verses, thus speaks of the successes of his youth : —

" Vains et faibles enfans dans ma veillesse nés,
Vous croyez sur les pas de vos heureux ainés,
Voir bientôt vos bons-mots, passant du peuple aux princes,
Charmer également la ville et les provinces;
Et, par le prompt effet d'un sel rejouissant,
Devenir quelquefois proverbes en naissant.
Mais perdez cette erreur dont l'appas vous amorce,
Le temps n'est plus, mes Vers, ou ma plume, en sa force
Du Parnasse Français formant les nourissons,
De si riches couleurs habillait ses leçons :
Quand mon Esprit, poussé d'un courroux légitime,
Vint devant la Raison plaider contre la Rime,
A tout le genre humain sçut faire le procès,
Et s'attaqua soi-même avec tant de succès.
Alors il n'était point de lecteur si sauvage,
Qui ne se déridât en lisant mon ouvrage,
Et qui pour s'égayer, souvent dans ses discours
D'un mot pris en mes vers n'empruntât le secours."

sensitive ear of the author was shocked by the mistakes that crept in, the result of this loose mode of publication, and he at last resolved to bring them out himself. He 1666.
published seven satires, preceded by an address to the Ætat.
king, which, however full of praise, could hardly be 30.
called flattery, since it echoed the voice of the whole French nation, and had been fairly earned by the sovereign. Louis then appeared in the brilliant position of a young monarch labouring for the prosperity and glory of his people. Cardinal Richelieu and cardinal Mazarin had disgusted the French with favourites and prime ministers. Louis was his own minister; unwearied in his application to business, and never suffering his pleasures to seduce him to idleness. These very pleasures, conducted with magnificence and good taste, dazzled and fascinated his subjects. He established his influence in foreign countries, forcing them to acknowledge his superiority. He aided Austria against the Turks; succoured Portugal; protected Holland: and while, with some arrogance, but more real greatness, he thus rose the sun of the world, he studied to make his court the centre of civilisation and knowledge. Such a course might well deserve the praises Boileau bestowed, who was also influenced by Colbert to give such a turn to his address as would lead the mind of the active and ardent sovereign to take delight in the blessings of peace, instead of the false glories of war. The first edition was also preceded by a preface, in which he apologises for the publication, to which he was solely urged by the disfigurement of his poems as they were then printed. He bids the authors whom he criticises remember that Parnassus was at all times a free country; and that, if he attacked their works, they might revenge themselves by criticising his; and to reflect that, if their productions were bad, they deserved censure; if good, nothing said in their dispraise would injure them.

In vain he tried to propitiate authors; and it must be acknowledged that, though some might be found candid enough to admit the truth of his strictures, no man

could be pleased at being the mark for ridicule. The outcry was prodigious, and he endeavoured to appease it, and justify himself, in his ninth satire, addressed to his understanding ("à son esprit:" the word thus used is very untranslateable; in former times the term
1667. wit had very much the same signification). About the
Ætat. same time he published his eighth satire on man, while
31. he still kept the ninth in manuscript. The king read the eighth, and admired it exceedingly. M. de Saint Maurice, an officer of the king's guard, who had a frequent opportunity of approaching the monarch, as he was teaching him to shoot flying, observed that Boileau had written a still better satire, in which there was mention of his majesty. "Mention of me!" cried the king haughtily. "Yes, sire," replied Saint Maurice, "and he speaks with all due respect." Louis showed a desire to see this new production; and Boileau gave a copy of it to his friend on condition that he showed it only to the king. Louis was much pleased: it became known at court, copies got abroad, and the poet found it necessary to publish it.

This was the period of his life when Boileau was fullest of energy and invention; and his industry equalled the fecundity of his wit. He himself used in after days to call it his *bon temp*, and alluded to it at once with pride and regret. He wrote several of his epistles, his "Art Poétique," and the "Lutrin." Having in his satires held up to ridicule the prevalent faults of the literature of his time, he turned his thoughts to giving rules of taste, and was desirous of pointing out the right path for authors to pursue. He mentioned his design to M. Patin, who doubted the possibility of adapting such a subject to French verse. In this he mistook the genius of his language. Narrow as are the powers of French verse, which was then, indeed, in its infancy, it was, under the master hand of Boileau, admirably fitted for pointed epigrams and sententious maxims. He felt this; and, notwithstanding his friend's counsels, he began his "Art Poétique;" and, carrying a

portion of it to his adviser, M. Patin at once acknowledged his mistake, and exhorted him to proceed.

At the same time he was employed on the "Lutrin;" a poem in which he displayed more fancy and sportive wit than he had before exhibited. It is not so graceful nor so airy as "The Rape of the Lock*;" but it is more witty, and abounds with those happy lines, many of which have passed into proverbs, while others concentrate, as it were, a whole comedy into a few lines.

The idea of the "Lutrin" was suggested in conversation. Some friends of the author were disputing concerning epic poetry, and Boileau maintained the opinion advanced in his "Poetics," that an heroic poem ought to have but a slender groundwork, and that its excellence depended on the power of its inventor to sustain and enlarge the original theme. The argument grew warm; but no one was convinced, and the conversation changed. It turned upon a ridiculous dispute between the treasurer and chanter of the Chapelle Royale of Paris, concerning the placing of a reading desk (*lutrin*).† M. de Lamoignon, the revered and excellent friend of Boileau, turned to him, and asked whether an heroic poem could be written on such a subject. "Why not?" was the reply: the company laughed; but Boileau, excited to think on the subject, found the burlesque of it open upon him. The spirited opening is the happiest effort of his muse; and, when he showed it to M. de Lamoignon, he was encouraged to proceed. At first he limited the poem to four cantos, which are the best; for, as is usually the case with burlesque, it becomes heavy and

* In an article in The Liberal, Mr. Leigh Hunt draws a parallel between Boileau and Pope, in that spirit of just and delicate criticism for which he is remarkable: "As Terence was called half Menander so Boileau is half Pope. He wants Ariel; he wants his invisible world; he wants that poetical part of poetry which consists in bringing a remote and creative fancy to wait on the more obvious wit and graces that lie about us." The critic, however, bestows great praise on the exordium of the "Lutrin;" and it must be remembered that Boileau preceded Pope, and that the English poet was in some sort an imitator of the French.

† The desk, being old fashioned and cumbrous, covered the whole space before the chanter, and hid him entirely; the chanter consequently removed it, which excited the anger of his superior, the treasurer, who had it replaced. It was again removed, again replaced; the whole chapter being in a state of dissension and enmity on the subject, till Lamoignon contrived to pacify the parties.

tedious as it is long drawn out. The first and second cantos are, indeed, far superior to the remainder. The wit has that pleasantry whose point is sharp, and yet without sting; so that even those attacked can smile. The poem begins with an exordium that at once opens the subject: —

"Je chante les combats, et ce Prélat terrible,
Qui par ses longs travaux, et sa force invincible,
Dans une illustre Eglise exercant son grand cœur,
Fit placer à la fin un Lutrin dans le chœur.
C'est en vain que le Chantre abusant d'un faux titre,
Deux fois l'en fit ôter par les mains du chapitre;
Ce Prélat sur le banc de son rival altier,
Deux fois le reportant, l'en couvrit tout entier."

It goes on to describe the peace and prosperity enjoyed by the Sainte Chapelle at Paris*: —

"Parmi les doux plaisirs d'une paix fraternelle,
Paris voyoit fleurir son antique chapelle.
Les chanoines vermeils et brillant de santé
S'engraissoient d'une longue et sainte oisiveté.
Sans sortir de leurs lits, plus doux que leurs hermines,
Ces pieux fainéans faisoient chanter matines;
Veilloient à bien diner, and laissoient en leur lieu,
A des chantres gagés le soin de loüer Dieu."

Discord witnesses their repose with indignation: —

"Quand la Discorde, encore toute noire de crimes,
Sortant des Cordeliers pour aller aux Minimes;
Avec cet air hideux qui fait frémir la paix,
S'arrèta près d'un arbre, au pié de son palais.
Là, d'un œil attentif contemplant son empire
A l'aspect du tumulte elle-même s'admire."

But, finding that the chapter of the Holy Chapel is impervious to her influence, her anger is roused; and, taking the form of an old chanter, she visits the treasurer, a bishop, resolved to excite him to strife. The description of the prelate, who, supported by a breakfast, dozed till dinner, is full of wit: —

"Dans le réduit d'une alcove enfonçée,
S'élève un lit de plume à grands frais amassée,
Quatre rideaux pompeux, par un double contour,
En defendant l'entrée à la clarté du jour.
Là, parmi les douceurs d'un tranquille silence,
Règne sur le duvet une heureuse indolence.
C'est là que le Prélât, muni d'un déjeûner,
Dormant d'un leger somme, attendait le diner.

* In the first edition of this work the scene of the poem was laid at the insignificant village of Pourges, not far from Paris. He found afterwards that the effect of the poem was injured by this change, and he transferred it to its right and proper place.

La jeunesse en sa fleur brille sur son visage,
Son menton sur son sein descend à double étage ;
Et son corps ramassé dans sa courte grosseur,
Fait gémir les coussins sous sa molle épaisseur."

Discord enters, and addresses herself to the work of mischief : —

" La déesse en entrant, qui voit la nappe mise,
Admire un si bel ordre, et reconnoit l'église ;
Et marchant à grands pas vers le lieu de repos,
Au Prélat sommeillant elle addresse ces mots :
' Tu dors, Prélat, tu dors ? et là-haut à ta place,
Le chantre aux yeux du chœur étale son audace :
Chante les *oremus*, fait des processions,
Et répand à grands flots les bénédictions.
Tu dors ? attens tu donc que, sans bulle et sans titre,
Il te ravisse encore le rochet et le mitre ?
Sors de ce lit oiseux, qui les tient attaché
Et renonce au repos, ou bien à l'évèché."

This exhortation has its full effect : the prelate rises, full of wrath and resolution, and even talks of assembling the chapter before dinner. Gilotin, his faithful almoner, remonstrates successfully against this piece of heroism :—

" Quelle fureur, dit-il, quel aveugle caprice,
Quand le diner est prêt, vous appelle à l'office ?
De votre dignité soutenez mieux l'éclat :
Est-ce pour travailler que vous etes prélat ?
A quoi bon ce dégoût et ce zèle inutile ;
Est-il donc pour jeûner quatre-temps ou vigile ?
Reprenez vos esprits, et souvenez-vous bien,
Qu'un diner réchauffé ne valût jamais rien.
Ainsi dit Gilotin, et ce ministre sage
Sur table, au même instant, fait servir le potage.
Le Prélat voit la soupe, et plein d'un saint respect,
Demeure quelque temps muet à cet aspect.
Il cède—il dine enfin."

The chapter is afterwards assembled ; the bishop, in tears, complains of the presumption of the chanter ; when Sidrac, the Nestor of the chapter, suggests a means of humbling him ; and a description of the famous reading-desk is introduced : —

" Vers cet endroit du chœur où le chantre orgueilleux,
Montre, assis à ta gauche, un front si sourcilleux ;
Sur ce rang d'ais serrés qui forment sa clôture,
Fut jadis un lutrin d'inégale structure,
Donc les flancs élargis, de leur vaste contour
Ombragoient pleinement tous les lieux d'alentour.
Derrière ce lutrin, ainsi qu'au fond d'un autre,
A peine sur son banc, on discernait le chantre.
Tandis qu'à l'autre banc le Prélat radieux,
Découvert à grand jour, attiroit tous les yeux.
Mais un démon, fatal à cette ample machine,
Soit qu'une main la nuit â hâté sa ruine,

Soit qu'ainsi de tout tems l'ordonnât le destin,
Fit tomber à nos yeux le pulpitre un matin.
J'eus beau prendre le ciel et le chantre à partie:
Il fallut l'emporter dans notre sacristie,
Où depuis trente hyvers sans gloire enseveli,
Il languit tout poudreux dans un honteux oubli.
Entends-moi donc, Prélat, dès que l'ombre tranquille
Viendra d'un crêpe noir envelopper la ville,
Il faut que trois de nous, sans tumulte et sans bruit,
Partent à la faveur de la naissante nuit;
Et du lutrin rompu réunissant la masse,
Aillent d'un zèle adroit le remettre à sa place.
Si le chantre demain ose le renverser,
Alors de cent arrêts tu peux le terrasser.
Pour soutenir tes droits, que le ciel autorise,
Abîme tout plutôt, c'est l'esprit de l'église.
C'est par là qu'un prélat signale la vigueur.
Ne borne pas ta gloire à prier dans le chœur:
Ces vertus dans Aleth peuvent être en usage,
Mais dans Paris, plaidons: c'est-là notre partage."

The last couplet contains a compliment to the bishop of Aleth, who dedicated his life to the instruction and improvement of the people of his diocese. We are a little astonished at the freedom with which Boileau rallies the clergy. At this period, when the quarrels of the jesuits and jansenists were dividing and convulsing the French church, the sarcasms of Boileau must have had a deep, perhaps a salutary, effect. The priesthood was enraged, and denounced the "Lutrin" as blasphemous; but the whole laity, with the king at their head, enjoyed the wit, and acknowledged its appositeness.

To return to the story of the poem. The advice of Sidrac is eagerly adopted. They draw lots, and three are thus selected for the task. Brontin comes first; then L'Amour, a hairdresser, a new Adonis with a blond wig, only care of Anne his wife, so haughty of mien that he is the terror of his neighbourhood; lastly, the name of Boirude, the sacristan, is drawn. This choice satisfies the chapter, and the first canto ends with the notice, that

"Le Prélat, resté seul, calme une peu son dépit,
Et jusqu'au souper se couche et s'assoupit."

The second book commences with a description of Renown, imitated from Virgil's Fame, who reveals the wigmaker's purpose to his wife, and a scene of remonstrance ensues and reproach, parodied on the parting of Æneas and Dido. The portions of the poem which are

parodies on the ancient epics are full of wit; but they are less amusing than those passages already cited, in which the poet gives scope to his fancy, unshackled by imitation of what indeed is inimitable. We are, therefore, less amused by the quarrel of the wigmaker and his wife than with the conclusion of the second book; when Discord marks the progress of the three adventurers towards the tower, where the *Lutrin* is hid, and shout forth so joyously as to awaken Indolence. The description of Indolence contains, perhaps, the best verses that Boileau ever wrote: —

" L'air qui gémit du cri de l'horrible déesse,
Va jusques dans Citeaux* réveiller la Mollesse.
C'est là qu'en un dortoir elle fait son séjour.
Les Plaisirs nonchalans folâtrent à l'entour.
L'un paîtrit dans un coin l'embonpoint des chanoines,
L'autre broye en riant le vermillon des moines;
La Volupté la sert avec des yeux dévots,
Et toujours le Sommeil lui verse des pavots.
Ce soir plus que jamais, en vain il les redouble,
La Mollesse à ce bruit se réveille, se trouble."

Night enters, and frightens her still more with the recital of how, on the morrow, the *Lutrin* was to appear in the Sainte Chapelle, and excite mutiny and war. Indolence, troubled by this account, lets fall a tear, and, opening an eye, complains in a feeble and interrupted voice: —

" O Nuit, que m'as tu dit? Quel démon sur la terre
Souffle dans tous les cœurs la fatigue et la guerre?
Hélas! qu'est devenu ce temps, cet heureux temps,
Où les rois s'honoraient du nom de fainéans,
S'endormoient sur le trône, et me servant sans honte,
Laissoient leur sceptre aux mains ou d'un maire ou d'un comte.
Aucun soin n'approchait de leur paisible cour,
On reposait la nuit, on dormait tout le jour.
* * * * *
Ce doux siècle n'est plus! le ciel impitoyable,
A placé sur le trône un prince infatigable.
Il brave mes douceurs, il est sourd à ma voix.
Tous les jours il m'éveille au bruit de ses exploits;
Rien ne peut arrêter sa vigilante audace,
L'été n'a point de feux, l'hyver n'a point de glace.
J'entens à son seul nom mes sujets frémir
En vain deux fois la Paix a voulu l'endormir:

* Citeaux was a famous abbey of Bernardins situated in Burgundy. The monks of Citeaux had not conformed to the reform lately introduced into other houses of their order, which caused Boileau to represent Indolence as domiciled among them.

Loin de moi son courage, entraîné par la gloire,
Ne se plait qu'à courir de victoire en victoire.*

This passage is remarkable as being the cause of Boileau's first appearance at court, of which further mention will be made. This episode is the jewel of the whole poem. Burlesque becomes tiresome when long drawn: though there are verses interspersed throughout full of sarcasm the most pointed, and ridicule the most happy, we are fatigued by a sort of monotony of tone, and the unvarying spirit of parody or irony that reigns throughout. The third canto is taken up by the enterprise of the three, who enter the sacristy to seize upon the *Lutrin*. Night has brought an owl, and hid it in the desk, whose sudden appearance terrifies the heroes, who are about to fly, till Discord rallies them, and they pursue the adventure, carry the desk in triumph, and place it in its ancient place before the seat of the chanter. The book concludes with an address to the latter, apostrophising the grief that will seize him when, on the morrow, the insult will be revealed. The fourth book contains the discovery — the rage of the chanter — his resolution to destroy the desk — the assembling of the chapter — their indignation — and it concludes with the destruction of the *Lutrin*, and its being carried off piecemeal. At first the poem consisted only of these four books. Boileau announced, that "reasons of great importance prevented his publishing the whole;" but the fact was, that only four books were at that time written. The fifth book describes the meeting of the inimical parties, and a battle that ensued. Both prelate and chanter, rushing to the *chapelle*, encounter each other, near the shop of Barbin, a bookseller: they eye each

* The speech of Indolence breaks off suddenly and characteristically, —

"La Mollesse, oppressée,
Dans sa bouche à ce mot sent sa langue glassée,
Et lasse de parler, succombant sous l'effort,
Soupire, étend les bras, ferme l'œil, et s'endort."

This last line, so expressive of the lassitude it describes, charmed the brilliant but unfortunate Henrietta of England, duchess of Orleans. One day, in the chapel at Versailles, while waiting the arrival of the king, she perceived Boileau, and, beckoning him to approach, whispered,

"Soupire, étend les bras, ferme l'œil, et s'endort."

other with fury, till a partisan of the chanter, unable to suppress his rage, seizes a ponderous volume—the "Great Cyrus" of mademoiselle Scuderi—hurls it at Boirude, who avoids the blow, and the vast mass assails poor Sidrac: the old man, "accablè de l'horrible Artamène," falls, breathless, at the feet of the bishop. This is a signal for a general attack: they rush into the shop, disfurnish the shelves, and hurl the volumes at one another. In naming the books thus used, Boileau indulges in satirical allusions to contemporary authors, and exclaims:—

> "O! que d'écrits obscurs, de livres ignorés,
> Furent en ce grand jour de la poudre tirés."

And then follows the names of many now so entirely forgotten, that the point of his sarcasms escapes us. The party of the chanter is on the point of being victorious, till the bishop, by a happy stratagem, contrives to escape the danger:—

> "Au spectacle étonnant de leur chute imprévue,
> Le Prélat pousse un cri qui pénètre la nue.
> Il maudit dans son cœur le démon des combats,
> Et de l'horreur du coup il recule six pas.
> Mais bientôt rappelant son antique proüesse,
> Il tire du manteau sa dextre vengeresse;
> Il part, et ses doigts saintement alongés,
> Bénit tous les passans en deux fils rangés.
> Il scait que l'ennemi, que ce coup va surprendre,
> Désormais sur ses piés ne l'oseroit l'attendre,
> Et déjà voit pour lui tout le peuple en courroux,
> Crier aux combattans: Profanes, à genoux.
> Le chantre, qui de loin voit approcher l'orage,
> Dans son cœur éperdu cherche en vain du courage.
> Sa fierté l'abandonne, il tremble, il cède, il fuit;
> Le long des sacrés murs sa brigade le suit.
> Tout s'écarte à l'instant, mais aucun n'en réchappe,
> Partout le doigt vainqueur les suit et les ratrappe.
> Evrard seul, en un coin prudemment retiré,
> Se croyoit à couvert de l'insulte sacré.
> Mais le Prélat vers lui fait une marche adroite:
> Il observe de l'œil, et tirant vers la droite,
> Tout d'un coup tourne à gauche, et d'un bras fortuné,
> Bénit subitement le guerrier consterné.
> Le chanoine, surpris de la foudre mortelle,
> Se dresse, et lève en vain une tête rebelle:
> Sur ses genoux tremblans il tombe à cet aspect,
> Et donne à la frayeur ce qu'il doit au respect."

Nothing can be more humorous than this description. The bishop conferring his blessing in a spirit of vengeance, and his angry enemies forced, unwillingly, to be

blessed, is truly ludicrous. Yet here Boileau laid himself open to attack. In the remainder of the poem, while ridiculing the clergy, no word escaped him that treated sacred things jocosely, and he was too pious indeed not to have shrunk from so doing. This joke made of a bishop's blessing intrenched on this rule: priests, who hitherto had remained silent, now ventured to raise the cry of blasphemy. However, it was innocuous: the excellent character and real piety of Boileau sheltered him from the attacks so levelled. The sixth book recounts the arrival of Piety, and Faith, and Grace, who awaken Aristus (the First President Lamoignon, to whom, he having died in the interval between the publishing the commencement of the poem and its conclusion, Boileau paid this tribute of respect), and, through his mediation, peace is restored.

We have given this detail of the "Lutrin," as being at once the best and the most successful of Boileau's poems. We now return to the author. We have alluded to his presentation at court, occasioned by the eulogy of Louis XIV., which the poet puts in the mouth of Indolence. Madame de Thianges, sister of madame de Montespan, was so struck by this passage, that, while the poem was still in manuscript, she read it to the king; and he, flattered and pleased, desired that the poet should be presented to him. Boileau accordingly appeared at court. The king conversed with him, and asked him what passage in his poems he himself esteemed the best. It so happened that the prince of Condé had found fault with the conclusion of his epistle to the king. It had ended with the fable of the two men quarrelling about an oyster they had found, and referred their dispute to a judge, who swallowed the cause of it in a moment. The prince considered this story, however well told, not in harmony with the elevated tone of the epistle; and Boileau, yielding to the criticism, wrote a different conclusion. When asked by the king for his favourite passage, the little tact he had as a courtier, joined to an author's natural partiality

for his latest production, made him cite the lines, of which these are the concluding ones: —

> " Et comme tes exploits étonnant les lecteurs,
> Seront à peine crus sur la foi des auteurs,
> Si quelque esprit malin les veut traiter de fables,
> On dira quelque jour, pour les rendre croyables.
> Boileau, qui dans ses vers, pleins de sincerité,
> Jadis à tout son siècle a dit la vérité,
> Qui mit à tout blâmer son étude et sa gloire,
> A pourtant de ce roi parlé comme l'histoire."

The king was naturally touched by this forcible and eloquent praise: the tears came into his eyes, and he exclaimed, "This is, indeed, beautiful; and I would praise you more had you praised me less." And at once he bestowed a pension on the poet. Such applause and such tribute, from a monarch then adored by his subjects, might have elated a weak man. Boileau afterwards related that, on returning home, his first emotion was sadness: he feared that he had bartered his liberty, and he regretted its loss.

Racine was already received at court, and a favourite. The intimate and tender friendship between him and Boileau caused them often to be together, and together they conceived many literary plans. One of these was the institution of an academy composed of a very small number of persons, who were selected for the purpose of writing a short explanation beneath every medal struck by Louis XIV. to celebrate the great events of his reign. These scanty notices were necessarily incomplete, and madame de Montespan originated the project of a regular history being compiled. "Flattery was the motive," writes madame de Caylus, in her memoirs; "but it must be allowed that it was not the idea of a common-place woman." Madame de Maintenon proposed that the king should name Boileau and Racine his joint historiographers, and the appointment accordingly took place. 1677. Ætat. 41.

The poets, gratified by the distinction, were eager to render themselves competent to the task. It must be remembered, that, though their inutility and subsequent loss have thrown Louis's conquests into the shade,

they were then the object of all men's admiration, and were the influential events of the time; while the rapidity and brilliancy of his victories dazzled his subjects, and intimidated all other nations. The two friends renounced poetry, and betook themselves to the studies appertaining to their future work. They applied themselves to the past history of their country, and to the memoirs and letters concerning the then present time, which, at the command of the king, were placed in their hands. Louis was at war with Holland, Spain, and the German empire. Turenne was dead; but many great generals, formed under him and the great Condé, remained. Louvois, as minister of war, facilitated every undertaking by the admirable order which he established in his department. The king joined the armies in person in the spring, and town
1677. after town fell into his hands. On his return from
Ætat. these rapid conquests, he asked his historiographers
41. how it was that they had not had the curiosity to witness a siege — "The distance was so slight," he said. "Very true," replied Racine, "but our tailors were too slow: we ordered clothes for the journey, but, before they came home, all the towns besieged by your majesty were taken." The compliment pleased Louis, who bade them prepare by times for the next campaign, as they ought to witness the events which, as historians, they were destined to relate.

1678. The following year, accordingly, the two authors
Ætat. accompanied the king to the siege of Gand. The fact
42. of two poets following the army to be present at sieges and battles was the source of a number of pleasantries at court. Their more warlike friends, in good-humoured raillery, laid a thousand traps for their ignorance: they often fell in; and when they did not they got the credit of so doing, as the king was to be diverted by their mistakes. The poets seem to have been singularly ignorant of everything appertaining to a journey, and to have shown the most amusing credulity. Racine was told that he must take care to have

his horse shod by a bargain of forfeit. "Do you imagine," said his adviser, M. de Cavoie, "that an army always finds blacksmiths ready on their march? Before you leave Paris, a bargain is made with a smith, who warrants, on penalty of a forfeit, that your horse's shoes shall remain on for six months." "I never heard of that before," said Racine; "Boileau did not tell me; but I do not wonder — he never thinks of anything." He hastened to his friend to reproach him for this neglect; Boileau confessed his ignorance; and they hurried out to seek the blacksmith most in use for this sort of bargain. The king was duly informed of their perplexity, and, by his raillery in the evening, undeceived them. One day, after a long march, Boileau, whose health was weak, being much fatigued, threw himself on his bed, supperless, on arriving. M. de Cavoie, hearing this, went to him, after the king's supper, and said, with an appearance of great uneasiness, that he had bad news. "The king," he said, "is displeased with you. He remarked a very blameable act of which you were guilty to-day." "What was it?" asked Boileau in alarm. "I cannot bring myself to tell you," replied his tormentor; "I cannot make up my mind to afflict my friends." Then, after teazing him for some time, he said, "Well, if I must confess it, the king remarked that you were sitting awry on your horse." "If that is all," said Boileau, "let me go to sleep." On one occasion, during this campaign, Louis having so exposed himself that a cannon ball passed within perilous vicinity, Boileau addressed him, saying, "I beg, sire, in the character of your historian, that you will not bring your history to so abrupt a conclusion."

Boileau's health prevented him from following any other campaign; but Racine accompanied the king in several, and wrote long narrations to his brother historian. It has been asserted that, though named historiographers, they did not employ themselves in fulfilling the duties of their office; and a fragment of

Racine's, on the siege of Namur, is the only relic that remains of their employment. Louis Racine, however, assures us that they were continually occupied on it. On their death, their joint labours fell into the hands of M. de Valincour, their successor, and were consumed when his house at Saint-Cloud was burned down.

That such was the case seems certain, from the fact that they were in the habit, when they had written any detail of interest, of reading it to the king. These readings took place in the apartments of madame de Montespan. Both had the entrée there at the hour of the king's visit, and madame de Maintenon was also present. Racine was the favourite of the latter lady, Boileau of the former; but the friends were wholly devoid of jealousy; and Boileau's free spirit led him to set little real store by court favour. In these royal interviews, the poets could mark the increasing influence of madame de Maintenon, and the decreasing favour of her rival. At one time, however, madame de Montespan contrived to get her friend excluded from the readings, much to the mortification of the historians. This did not last long. One day, the king being indisposed, and keeping his bed, they were summoned, with an order to bring some newly-written portion of their history with them. They were surprised to find madame de Maintenon sitting in an arm-chair near the king's bed, in familiar conversation with him. They were about to commence reading when madame de Montespan entered. Her uneasy manner and exaggerated civilities showed her vacillating position; till the king, to put an end to her various demonstrations of annoyance, told her to sit down and listen, as it was not just that a work, commenced under her directions, should be read in her absence.

Such scenes seem scarcely to enter into a narration of Boileau's life; but, he being present at them, they form a portion, and cannot be passed over. It is essential to his character to show, that, though admitted to a court, the cynosure of all men's aspirations, the focus

of glory, he was neither dazzled nor fettered by its influence. As a courtier he maintained a free and manly bearing, while his absence of mind even caused him to fall into mistakes which shocked his more careful friend Racine. Being in conversation one day with madame de Maintenon on the subject of literature, Boileau exclaimed against the vulgar burlesque poetry which had formerly been in fashion, and it escaped him to say, "Happily this vile taste has passed away, and Scarron is no longer read even in the provinces." Racine reproached him afterwards:—"Why name Scarron before her?" he said; "are you ignorant of their near connection."—"Alas! no," replied Boileau; "but it is the first thing I forget when I am in her company." He even forgot himself so far, on occasions, as to mention Scarron before the king. Racine was still more scandalised on this: — "I will not accompany you to court," he said, "if you are so imprudent." "I am ashamed," replied Boileau; "but what man is exempt from saying foolish things?" and he excused himself by alleging the example of M. Arnaud, who was even more absent. Nor did he limit his want of pliancy to mere manner. He did not disguise more important differences of opinion. The king and court espoused the cause of the jesuits: to be a jansenist often caused the entire loss of court favour; but Boileau did not conceal his adherence to that party, and his partiality to its chief, M. Arnaud; and as he grew older, instead of growing more servile, he emancipated himself yet more entirely from court influence; and his "Epistle on Ambiguity" is a proof of an independence of spirit that commands our warmest esteem.

His courage in thus openly espousing the opinions of jansenism surprised Racine. "You enjoy," he said to him, "a privilege I cannot obtain. You say things I dare not say. You have praised persons in your poems whom I do not venture to mention. You are the person that ought to be accused of jansenism; yet I am much more attacked. What can be the *reason?*" "It is

an obvious one," replied Boileau; "you go to mass every day; I only go on Sundays and festivals."

The honour of belonging to the academy was in those days eagerly sought after. Boileau aspired to a seat, but never solicited it, and was passed over. It has been related in the life of La Fontaine how displeased the king was with this omission, and how he refused to confirm La Fontaine's election till Boileau was also chosen. His speech on taking possession of his chair, in which it was the fashion for the new member to humiliate himself, and exalt the academy with ridiculous exaggerations, was dignified, but modest. He alluded to the attacks he had made on authors who were members of the academy as "many reasons that shut its doors against him." His after career as member was rather stormy. Surrounded by writers whom he had satirised, and who conceived themselves injured, he had to contend with a numerous party. His chief antagonist was a M. Charpentier, on whom he often spent the treasures of his wit, and discomfited by his raillery, though he had a host of members on his side. One day, however, he gained his point. "It is surprising," he said: "everybody sided with me, and yet I was in the right."

His life, meanwhile, was easy and agreeable. Undisturbed by passion, yet of warm and affectionate feelings, with a mind ever active, and a temper unruffled, the society and pleasures of Paris, the favour of the great, and love of his friends, filled and varied his days. The slight annuity he had purchased with his inheritance was seasonably increased by the pension which the king had bestowed on him, and his salary as historiographer. He was careful and economical, but the reverse of grasping or avaricious. He had an ill-founded scruple as to an author's profiting by his writings, as if he had not a legitimate claim on the price which the public were eager to pay to acquire his productions. He carried this so far as to infect Racine with the same notion. In his own case there might be some ground; since, when he first published, his works consisted of satires, and a delicate,

feeling man might shrink from profiting by the attacks he made on others. Another instance is given of his scrupulousness in money matters. He enjoyed for some years an income arising from a benefice. His venerated friend, M. de Lamoignon, represented to him that he could not conscientiously, as a layman, enjoy the revenues of the church ; and he not only gave up his benefice, but, calculating how much he had received during the years that he enjoyed it, he distributed that sum among the poor of the place. Another anecdote is told of his generosity. M. Patin was esteemed one of the cleverest men of the times, as well as one the most excellent and virtuous. His passion for literature was such, that he neglected his profession as advocate for its sake, and fell into indigence. He was forced to sell his library: Boileau bought it, and then begged his friend to keep possession of it as long as he lived. He was, indeed, generally kind-hearted and generous to authors, unchecked by any ill conduct on their part. Often he lent money to a miserable writer, Liniére, who would go and spend it at alehouses, and write a song against his creditor. The economy that allowed him to be thus generous was indeed praiseworthy, and did not arise from love of money, but a spirit of independence, and the power of self-denial in matters of luxury.

The only thing that seems to have unpleasantly disturbed his easy yet busy life was a delicate state of health, and he grew more ailing as he grew older. At one time an affection of the chest caused him to lose his voice, and he was ordered to drink the waters of the baths of Bourbon as a means of regaining it. His correspondence with Racine on this occasion is published. Boileau's letters are the best, the most witty, easy, and amusing. Racine relates how each day the king inquired after his health, and was eager for his return to court; while Boileau laments over his continued indisposition. There was a dispute among the physicians, as to his bathing in the waters as well as drinking them : some of the learned declaring such an act fatal, while others

1687. Ætat. 51.

recommended it as a mode of cure. Racine related to the king, while at dinner, the perplexity of his friend between these contradictory counsels. "For my part," said the princess de Conti, who was sitting near Louis, "I would rather be mute for thirty years, than risk my life to regain my voice." Boileau replied, "I am not surprised at the princess of Conti's sentiment. If she lost her speech, she would still retain a million other charms to compensate to her for her loss, and she would still be the most perfect creature that for a long time nature has produced; but a wretch like me needs his voice to be endured by men, and to dispute with M. Charpentier. If it were only on the latter account one ought to risk something; and life is not of such value, but that one may hazard it for the sake of being able to interrupt such a speaker." These letters are very entertaining; they display the style of the times, and the vivacity and amiableness of Boileau's disposition, in very pleasing colours. His vivacity was of the head, and of temper. He was exempt from vehemence of feeling; and did not suffer the internal struggles to which those are subject whose souls are impregnated with passion; nor was he satirical in conversation: as madame de Sevignè said of him, he was cruel only in verse; and Lord Rochester's expression was applied to him —

"The best good man, with the worst-natured muse."

Without pride, also, and without pretension, he could turn his own fame and labours into a jest. Going one day to present the order for his pension, which said that it was granted "on account of the satisfaction which the king derived from his works," the clerk asked him what sort of works his were. "Masonry," he replied: "I am an architect." At another time, when, passing Easter at a friend's house in the country, and being exact in fulfilling his religious duties, he made his confession to a country curate, to whom he was unknown, the confessor asked him what his usual occupations were? "Writing verses," replied the penitent. "So much

the worse," said the curate; "and what sort of verses?" "Satires." "Still worse — and against whom?" "Against those who write bad verses, against the vices of the times, against pernicious books, romances, and operas." "Ah!" cried the curate, "that is not so bad, and I have nothing to say against it."

His spirit of intolerance for "those who wrote bad 1687.
verses," or approved them, was excited to its height Ætat.
by Perrault's * "Siècle de Louis Quatorze." This 51.
poem was the origin of the famous dispute as to the ancients and moderns, which "Swift's Battle of the Books" made known in this country. Perrault, with little Latin, and no Greek, undertook to depreciate Homer; and he had Fontenelle for his ally, who, with more learning and less taste, declared that, if the Greek bucolic writers had now first produced their pastorals, they would be scouted as wretched. Perrault did not content himself with the exposition of his opinion in his poem; he wrote a "Parallel between the Ancients and Moderns," in which he not only praised the good writers of the day, but even Chapelain, Quinault, Cotin, and others on whom Boileau had set the seal of
his irony. The satirist could neither brook this rebel- 1692
lion against his fiat, nor the sort of blasphemy indulged Ætat.
in against those great masters of the art whom he was 56.
aware he but feebly imitated. He wrote several bitter epigrams against Perrault; and then, finding that by no explanation or translation could he make a mere French reader understand the sublimity of Pindar, he sought to imitate this poet in his ode on the taking of Namur.

* Charles Perrault was a man of merit and imagination, though his want of learning led him into such deplorable literary errors. It was through his representations that Colbert founded the academies of painting, sculpture, and architecture; and he always exerted his influence in favour of the improvement of science and art. The work by which he has, however, obtained immortality, is his "Mother Goose's Tales." Perhaps he would have disdained a fame thus founded; but, while the fancy is the portion of the human mind, shared in common by young and old, which receives the greatest pleasure from works of intellect; while (in spite of Rousseau's doctrine) children are singularly quick in discerning the difference between a lie and a fable, and that to interest their imaginations is the best method of enlarging their minds and cultivating their affections; Perrault's name will be remembered with gratitude, and "Mother Goose's Tales" remain the classic work of a child's library.

This was a bold undertaking, and it cannot be said that he succeeded; for the French language was then far less capable than now of expressing the sublime; and Boileau's talent was not of that elevated and daring kind which could invent new modes of expression, and force his language to embody the ideal and bold images that constitute the sublime. Still we must honour the attempt for the sake of its motive. "The following ode," he says, in his preface, "was written on occasion of those strange dialogues, lately published, in which all the great writers of antiquity are treated as authors to be compared with the Chapelains and Cotins; and in which, while it is sought to do honour to our age, it is really vilified by the fact that there exist men capable of writing such nonsense. Pindar is the worst treated." He goes on to say that, as it was exceedingly difficult to explain the beauties of Pindar to those who did not understand Greek, he attempted to write a French ode in imitation of his style, as the best mode of conveying an idea of it. This war went on for some time; and various attacks, replies, and rejoinders appeared on both sides. At last a personal reconciliation took place between Boileau and Perrault; neither yielded his opinion, but they ceased to write against each other.

1659. At this time also he wrote other satires: — one on women, which rather consists of portraits of various faulty
Ætat. 59. individuals than a satire against the sex in general. It is by no means one of the best of his works. We may say otherwise, however, of the spirit that reigns in the satire addressed to Ambiguity, and which, from the boldness with which it attacks the jesuits, is at once one of the most useful of his works, and displays the independence of his soul. He wrote his epistle also on the Love of God, another jansenist production. At this time he again awoke to the pleasures of composition, at the same time that he showed such a love for his works that he emptied his portfolios of every scrap of verse he had ever written, and placed them in the hands of the

booksellers.* As he grew older he became more recluse in his habits, without losing any of the pleasure he always felt in the society of his intimate friends. The turn he had for personal enjoyment, which had shown itself in youth, in a love for social and convivial pleasures, became a sort of happy indolence, enlivened by the pleasures of friendship. His correspondence with Racine displays an affectionate disposition, an easy carelessness as to money, and a quiet sort of wit, which turned to pleasantry the ordinary routine of life, and bespeaks a mind at ease, and a well-balanced disposition. The expenses of his wars caused Louis XIV. to reduce the pensions he had granted, and those of Boileau and Racine suffered with the rest. Racine was then at court; and he wrote to his friend to inform him, that their salaries as historiographers were fixed at 4000 livres a year for himself and 2000 for Boileau; the health of the latter not permitting him to follow the army being the cause of his receiving the smaller sum. Racine adds, "You see everything is arranged as you yourself wished, yet I am truly annoyed that I appear to receive more than you; but, besides the fatigue of the journeys, which I am glad that you are spared, I know that you are so noble and friendly that I feel sure you will rejoice at my being the best paid." Boileau replied, "Are you mad with your compliments? Do you not know that I myself prescribed the mode in which this affair should be settled; and can you doubt but that I am satisfied with an arrangement by which I receive all I asked?" His friendship for Racine seems to have been the warmest feeling of his heart; and growing deaf as he grew old, and leading a more and more retired life, the tragedian, his family, and a few others, formed all his society. There is something simple and touching in the mention Racine makes of their visits in his letters to his eldest son. The bitter satirist adapting his talk to the younger children of his

* Racine's Letters.

friend, while he was so deaf that he could not hear their replies, and his eager endeavours to amuse them, gives zest to Racine's exclamation, "He is the best man in the world!" Sometimes the spirit of composition revived in him, but it quickly grew cold again*; yet, while it lasted, it furnished occupation and amusement. He did not live wholly at Paris. He had saved 8000 livrés, and with this sum he purchased a country house at Auteuil. Charmed with his acquisition, he at first spent a good deal on it; he embellished the grounds, and delighted to assemble his friends together. Racine often retired there to repose from his attendance at court, and from his fatigues in following the army in various campaigns. Boileau, fastidious in all things, knew well how to choose his company. The conversations were either enlivened by sallies of wit, or rendered interesting by his sagacity and good taste. He had long renounced his more equivocal modes of amusing, such as mimicry, as unworthy. In the heyday of youth sallies of this sort are indulged in under the influence of high animal spirits; and it is whimsical to remark how the slothful spirit of age gravely denounces that as wrong which it is no longer capable of achieving. Boileau, however, had many other resources. His guests delighted to gather his opinions, and hung upon his maxims. He criticised the works of the day, and the favourite authors. He admired La Bruyere, though he called him obscure, and justly remarked that he spared himself the most difficult part of a work when he omitted the transitions and links of one portion with another. No one dared praise St. Evremond before him, though he had become the fashionable author of the day. He detested low pleasantry. "Racine," he said, "is sometimes silly enough to laugh over Scarron's travestie of Virgil, but he hides this from me."

1698. Thus tranquil and esteemed, surrounded by friends,
Ætat. and without a care, he lived long, notwithstanding the
62. weakness of his constitution and bad health. A few days after the death of Racine, he appeared at court to

* Lettres à Racine.

take the king's commands with regard to the task of historiographer, which had now devolved entirely on himself. He spoke to the king of the intrepidity with which his friend viewed the approaches of death. "I am aware of this," replied Louis, "and somewhat surprised, for he feared death greatly; and I remember that at the siege of Gand you were the more courageous of the two." The king afterwards added, "Remember, I have always an hour in the week to give you when you like to come." Boileau, however, never went to court again. His friends often entreated him to appear from time to time, but he answered, "What should I do there? I cannot flatter." No doubt he felt admiration for all Louis's great qualities, and gratitude for the kindness shown to himself; but he was too penetrating an observer, and too impartial a judge, not to be aware that the court paid to a king, amounting in those days almost to idolatry, renders him a factitious personage, and only fit to be approached by those who, either through long habit, or by having some point to gain, accommodate themselves to that sort of watchful deference and self-immolation which is intolerable to persons accustomed to utter spontaneously what they think, and to enjoy society so far as they are unshackled by fears of offending a master.

Boileau survived Racine several years: this period was spent in retirement, and his health grew weaker and weaker. He lived either at Paris or Auteuil. There Louis Racine, the son of the poet, from whom we gather these details, often visited him. He was a youth at that time; he and Boileau played at skittles together; the poet was a good player, and often knocked down all nine at one bowling. "It must be confessed," he said, "that I possess two talents equally useful to my country; I play well at nine-pins, and write verses." Louis Racine was then at school at Beauvais. He wrote an elegy on a dog; and his mother, a good but narrow-minded woman, took it to Boileau, and begged him to dissuade her son from following the career of a poet.

The youth went trembling to hear his fiat; and Boileau, who saw no eminent talent in the production of his young friend, told him that he was very bold, with the name he bore, to attempt poetry. "Perhaps," he said, "you might one day write well; but I am incredulous as to extraordinary events, and I never heard of the son of a great poet turning out a great poet. The younger Corneille has merit, but he will always be a minor Corneille; take care that the same thing does not happen to you." Thus it is that in age we look back on the career we boldly enter on in youth; and aware of the dangers we ran, and forgetting the enthusiasm and passion that then raised us above fear, and promised us success, we endeavour to impart to our juniors the prudence and experience we have gained. In vain. Life would be far other than it is, did the young, at the dictum of the old, divest themselves of errors and passions, desires and anticipations, and see as plainly as those advanced in life the nothingness of the objects of their wishes. It is the scheme of the Creator, for some unknown purpose, that each new generation should go over the same course; and each, reaching the same point of rest, should wonder what the impulse is that drives successors over the same dangerous ground.

To return to Boileau: not long before his death he somewhat changed his habits. Though not in want of money, he was induced, by the solicitations of a friend, to sell him his house at Auteuil, it being promised that a room should always be reserved for him, and that he should continue as much its master as when he actually possessed it. Fifteen days after the sale he visited the place, and, going into the garden, looked about for a little grove, beneath whose shade he was accustomed to saunter and indulge in reverie; it was no longer there: he called for the gardener, and heard that, by order of the new proprietor, his favourite trees had been cut down: he paused for a moment, and then went back to his carriage, saying, "Since I am no longer master, what business have I here?" He returned instantly to Paris, and never revisited Auteuil.

Boileau was a pious man; he fulfilled strictly his religious duties. It is told of him that, dining with the duke of Orleans on a fast-day, nothing but flesh being served at table, Boileau confined himself to bread: the duke, perceiving this, said, "The fish has been forgotten, so you must be content to forego the fast as we do." "Yet," said Boileau, "if you were but to strike the ground with your foot, fish would rise from the earth." A witty and happy adaptation of Pompey's boast. In his latter years he congratulated himself on the purity of his poems. "It is a great consolation," he said, "to a poet about to die, to feel that he has never written any thing injurious to virtue."

His last days were employed in correcting a complete edition of his works. This was to include his "Dialogue on the Romances," which so pleasantly ridicules the language which mademoiselle Scuderi puts in the mouths of Cyrus, Horatius Cocles, and Clelia. Out of respect for the authoress he had hitherto refrained from printing it; but it had been read in private: the marquis de Sévigné had written it down from recollection; and it had been printed in a pirated edition of the works of St. Evremond. Mademoiselle Scuderi being dead, Boileau resolved on publishing it. But the chief addition to his edition was his "Epistle to Ambiguity." Already was the publication in progress when the jesuits took alarm. They gave it in charge to père le Tellier, the king's confessor, to speak to Louis, and to induce him to stop the publication. The monarch was docile to the voice of his confessor: he not only forbade Boileau to publish the satire, but ordered him to give up the original into his hands, informing him, at the same time, that with this omission his edition might appear. But Boileau, feeling himself about to die, disdained to temporise, and preferred suppressing the whole edition rather than truckle to the jesuits.

His death was christian and catholic, yet not so 171
strictly devout as that of Racine. To the last he main- Æt.
tained his literary tastes, and was alive to critical 7

remark. A friend thought to amuse him during his last illness by reading a new and popular tragedy: "Ah! my friend," he cried, "am I not dying in time? the Pradons, whom we laughed at in our youth, were suns in comparison with these authors." When he was asked how he felt, he replied by a verse from Malherbe,

"Je suis vaincu du temps, je cède à ses outrages."

As he was expiring, he saw M. Coutard approach; he pressed his hand, saying, "Bon jour, et adieu — c'est un long adieu."

He died of dropsy on the chest, on the 13th of March, 1711, in the seventy-fifth year of his age. He was buried in the lower chapel of the Sainte Chapelle, immediately under the spot which, in the upper chapel, is immortalised by his "Lutrin." Numerous friends attended the funeral; and one among them overheard a woman say, "He had many friends, it seems, yet I have heard that he spoke ill of everybody."

This is an exaggeration of what may be considered as the only flaw in Boileau's character: — generous and charitable; simple and natural in his manners; full of friendship, kindness, and integrity; we almost hesitate to pronounce severity of criticism against bad books a fault; but we cannot avoid perceiving that the ridicule he has attached to the names of Chapelain, Cotin, and others, however well deserved by their writings, might have been spared to the men. It reminds us too strongly of the anonymous critics of the present day not to be held in detestation.

It is not necessary to enter at length on the subject of his works. He possessed to a high degree the faculty of wit; generally speaking wit simply, not humour*: point the most acute, expressions the most happy, embody and carry home his meaning. He is not as elegant as Horace, nor as bitter nor as elevated as Juvenal:

* There is humour, certainly, in the description of the bishop, in the "Lutrin," escaping from his enemies by forcing them to receive his blessing.

he indeed resembles the former more than the latter; but he has vivacity and truth, and a high tone of moral and critical feeling, which give strength to his epigrams; his principal defect being the want of a playful fancy, which caused a sort of aridity to be spread over his happiest sallies. He laboured to polish his verses diligently; and their apparent ease results from the justness of taste that taught him to retrench every superfluity of expression. The "Lutrin" rises superior to his other productions; and in these days, and for posterity, his fame will chiefly rest upon that poem.

RACINE.

1639—1699.

Born under not very dissimilar circumstances from Boileau — running, without great variation, the same literary career — sometimes associated in the same labours, always making a part of the same society, and, throughout, his dearest friend, yet the texture of their minds caused Racine to be a very different person from the subject of the foregoing sketch. The lives of both were unmarked by events; but while the one calmly and philosophically enjoyed the pleasures of life, unharmed by its pains, the more tender and sensitive nature of Racine laid him open to their impression. Censures, that only roused Boileau to bitter replies, saddened and crushed his friend. The feelings of religion, which made the former a good and pious man, rendered the other, to a great degree, a bigot. The one was independent of soul, the other sought support: yet, as the faults of Racine were combined with tenderness and amiability of disposition, and as he possessed the virtues of a warm heart, it is impossible not to regard his faults with kindness, while we deplore the mistakes into which they betrayed him. To trace out the different natures of men, to account for the variation, either from innate difference, or the influence of dissimilar circumstances, is, perhaps, one of the most useful objects of a biographer. We all vary one from another, yet none of us tolerate the difference in others: the haughty and independent spirit disdains the pliant and tender, while this regards its opposite as unfeeling and lawless. The conviction, on the contrary, ought to be deeply impressed

of the *harmony of characters* — that certain defects and certain virtues are allied, and ever go together. We should not ask the sheep for fleetness, nor wool from the horse; but we may love and admire the gifts that each enjoy, and profit by them, both as matter of advantage and instruction.

Racine was born of a respectable family of Fertè-Milon, a small town of Valois. His father and grandfather both enjoyed small financial situations in their native town. His father, Jean Racine, married Jeanne Sconin, whose father occupied the same sort of position in society. This pair had two children, whom their deaths left orphans in infancy. The wife died in 1641, and her husband survived her only two years.

The two children, a boy and a girl, were brought up by their maternal grandfather. The daughter passed her life at Fertè-Milon, and died there at the advanced age of ninety-two. The son, named Jean, was born on the 21st of December, 1639. We have few traces of his childhood. It was not, apparently, a happy one; at least we are told that, when all the family of Sconin assembled at his house, on those festive anniversaries which the French celebrate with so much exactitude, his orphan grandchildren were wholly disregarded *; and the gentle sensitive heart of Racine must have felt this neglect severely. His first studies were made at Beauvais. At this time the civil war of the fronde was raging in France. The scholars at Beauvais were also divided into parties; and "Vive Mazarin," or "A bas Mazarin," became the rallying cries of their mimic wars; yet not so mimic but that the little combatants encountered perils. Racine himself received a wound on his forehead, of which he ever after bore the mark. The master of the school used to show the scar to everybody as a token of the boy's courage; a quality of which, in after life, he made no great display. His grandfather 1670.
died while he was still a child, and he fell to the care of Ætat. 11.

* Life by Louis Racine. The authentic accounts of Racine are chiefly founded on this sketch, and on his correspondence.

his widowed grandmother. Two of this lady's daughters were nuns in the abbey of Port Royal, and she took up her abode with them; which was, doubtless, the cause that, on leaving the school at Beauvais, Racine was received a pupil in the seminary of that convent.

1655. Ætat. 16. At this time, in France, the education of young people was chiefly committed to the clergy. The jesuits did all they could to engross an employment full of promise of power — the great aim of that society. Their principal rivals were the teachers of the abbey of Port Royal, whose methods were admirable, and whose enthusiasm led them to diligence and patience in their task. Theoretically it seems an excellent plan to commit the bringing up of youth to those who dedicate their lives to the strictest practices of virtue, as the recluses of Port Royal at that time undoubtedly did. But, in fact, the monkish spirit is so alien to the true purposes of life, and men who sacrifice every pleasure and affection to the maintenance of ascetic vows must naturally give so preponderating an importance to the objects that influence them, that such teachers are apt rather to trouble the conscience, and plunge youth in extravagant devotion; inspiring rather a polemical spirit, or a dream of idleness, than instilling that manly and active morality, and that noble desire to make a right use of the faculties given us by God, which is the aim of all liberal education. The effects of a monkish tutelage spread a sinister influence over the ductile disposition of Racine; the faults of his character were all fostered; the independence and hardihood he wanted were never instilled.

As a school for learning it succeeded admirably. Greek and Latin were assiduously cultivated by the tutors, and Racine's wonderful memory caused him to make swift progress. M. de Sacy took particular pains with him: discerning his talents, and hoping that he would one day distinguish himself, he took him into his own apartments, and gave him the name and treatment of a son. M. Hannon, who succeeded to M. de Sacy, on the death of the latter, continued the same

attentions. Racine was poor: he could not purchase good copies of the classics, and he read them in the Basle editions without any Latin translation. His son tells us that he still possessed his father's Plutarch and Plato, the margins of which were covered with annotations which proved his application and learning.

It is impossible not to be struck by the benefit derived from the Greek writers by a child of genius, who was indebted to the respect which the priests showed for ancient authors for the awakening of his mind to poetry and philosophy. But for this saving grace the monks would probably have allowed him to read only books of scholastic piety. Racine, young as he was, drank eagerly from the purest fountains of intellectual beauty and grace, opened by the Greeks, unsurpassed even to this time. His imaginative spirit was excited by the poetry of the Greek tragedians; and he spent many a day wandering in the woods of Port Royal with the works of Sophocles and Euripides in his hands. He thus obtained a knowledge of these divine compositions which always remained; and in after years he could recite whole plays.* It happened, however, that he got hold of the Greek romance of the loves of Theagines and Chariclea. This was too much for priestly toleration. The sacristan discovered the book and devoted it to the flames; another copy met the same fate. Racine bought a third, learnt the romance by heart, and then took the volume to the monk, and told him he might burn that also.

It would appear that Racine was happy while at Port Royal. He was loved by his masters: his gentle amiable nature led him to listen docilely to their lessons; and the tenderness of his disposition was akin to that piety which they sedulously sought to inculcate. The peculiar tenets of the Port Royal, which fixed the

* M. de Valincour says, "I remember one day at Auteuil, when on a visit to Boileau, with M. Nicole and other friends of distinguished merit, that we made Racine talk of the Œdipus of Sophocles, and he recited the whole play to us, translating it as he went on." Racine often said that he treated subjects adopted by Euripides, but he never ventured to follow in the steps of Sophocles.

foundations of all religion in the love of God, found an echo in his heart; but how deeply is it be regretted, that he imbibed that narrow spirit along with it that restricted the adoration of the Creator to the abstract idea of himself, rather than a warm diffusive love of the creation. Poetry was the very essence of Racine's mind—the poetry of sentiment and the passions; but poetry was forbidden by the jansenists, except on religious subjects, and Racine could only indulge his tastes by stealth. His French verses, composed at the Port Royal, are not good; for his native language, singularly ill-adapted to verse, had not yet received that spirit of harmony with which he was destined to inspire her.* His biographers have preserved some specimens of his Latin verses, which have more merit. They want originality and force, but they are smooth and pleasing, and show the command he had of the language.

At the age of nineteen he left the Port Royal to follow his studies in the college of Harcour, at Paris. The logic of the schools pleased him little: his heart was still set on verse; and his letters, at this period, to a youthful friend, show the playfulness of his mind, and his desire to distinguish himself as a writer. An occasion presented itself. 1660. Ætat. 21. The marriage of Louis XIV. caused every versifier in France to bring his tribute of rhymes. Racine was then unknown. He had, indeed, written a sonnet to his aunt, Madame Vitart, to compliment her on the birth of a child, which sonnet, becoming known at Port Royal, awoke a holy horror throughout the community. His aunt, Agnes de Sainte Thecle Racine, then abbess, who had been his instructress, wrote him letter after letter, " excommunication after excommu-

* Racine polished French poetry, and inspired it with harmony, though, even in his verses, we are often annoyed by trivialities induced by the laws of rhyme. It was left for La Martine to overcome this difficulty — to put music into his lines, and bend the stubborn material to his thoughts. Some of the earlier poems, in particular, of this most graceful and harmonious poet make you forget that you are reading French —you are only aware of the perfection of his musical pauses, the expressive sweetness of his language, and feel how entirely his mind can subdue all things to its own nature, when French verse, expressing his ideas, becomes sublime, flowing, and graceful. We cannot believe, however, that any poet could so far vanquish its monotony as to adopt it to heroic narrative; it is much that it has attained this degree of excellence in lyrics.

nication," he calls it, to turn his heart from such profane works. But the suggestions of the demon were too strong; and Racine wrote an ode, entitled "Nymphes de la Seine," to celebrate his sovereign's nuptials. His uncle, M. Vitart, showed it to M. Chapelain, at that time ruler of the French Parnassus. Chapelain thought the ode showed promise, and suggested a few judicious alterations. "The ode has been shown to M. Chapelain," Racine writes to a friend: "he pointed out several alterations I ought to make, which I have executed, fearful at the same time that these changes would have to be changed. I knew not to whom to apply for advice. I was ready to have recourse, like Malherbe, to an old servant, had I not discovered that she, like her master, was a jansenist, and might betray me, which would ruin me utterly, considering that I every day receive letters on letters, or rather excommunication on excommunication, on account of my unlucky sonnet."

The ode, however, and its alterations, found favour in the sight of Chapelain. It deserves the praise at least of being promising — it is neither bombastic nor tedious, if it be neither original nor sublime. The versification is harmonious, and, as a whole, it is unaffected and pleasing. Chapelain carried his approbation so far as to recommend the young poet and his ode to his patron, M. Colbert, who sent him a hundred louis from the king, and soon after bestowed on him a pension of six hundred livres, in his quality of man of letters.

Still, as time crept on, both Racine and his friends deemed it necessary to take some decision with regard to his future career. His uncle, M. Vitart, intendant of Chevreux, gave him employment to overlook some repairs at that place: he did not like the occupation, and considered Chevreux a sort of prison. His friends at Port Royal wished him to apply to the law; and, when he testified his disinclination, were eager to obtain for him some petty place which would just have maintained him. Racine appears to have been animated by no mighty ambition. His son, indeed, tells us that, when young, he had an ardent desire for glory, sup-

pressed afterwards by feelings of religion. But these aspirations probably awoke in their full force afterwards, when success opened the path to renown. There are no expressions in his early letters that denote a thirst for fame: probably his actual necessities pressed too hardly on him: he thought, perhaps, more of escape from distasteful studies than attaining a literary reputation, and thought that he might indulge his poetical dreams in the inaction of a clerical life. Whatever his motives were, he showed no great dislike to become in some sort a member of the church; and, when an opening presented itself, did not turn away.

He had an uncle, father Sconin, canon of St. Geneviève at Paris, and at one time general of that community. He was of a restless, meddling disposition; so that at last his superiors, getting tired of the broils in which he involved them, sent him into a sort of honourable banishment at Uzés, where he possessed some ecclesiastical preferments. He wished to resign his benefice to his nephew. Racine did not much like the prospect; but he thought it best, in the first place, to accept his uncle's invitation, and to visit him.

Uzés is in Provence. Racine repaired to Lyons, and then down the Rhone to his destination. In the spirit of a true Parisian, he gives no token of delight at the beauties of nature: he talks of high mountains and precipitous rocks with a carelessness ill-befitting a poet; and shows at once that, though he could adorn passion and sentiment with the colours of poetry, he had not that higher power of the imagination which allies the emotions of the heart with the glories of the visible creation, and creates, as it were, "palaces of nature" for the habitation of the sublimer passions. We have several of his letters written at this period. They display vivacity, good humour, and a well-regulated mind: scraps of verses intersperse them; but these are merely *apropos* of familiar or diverting events. There is no token of the elevated nor the fanciful — nothing, in short, of the poet who, if he did not, like his masters the Greeks, put a soul into rocks,

streams, flowers, and the winds of heaven, yet afterwards showed a spirit true to the touch of human feeling, and capable of giving an harmonious voice to sorrow and to love. One of his chief annoyances during this visit was the *patois* of the people. He was eager to acquire a pure and elegant diction; and he feared that his ear would be corrupted by the jargon to which he was forced to listen. "I have as much need of an interpreter here," he writes, "as a Muscovite in Paris. However, as I begin to perceive that the dialect is a medley of Spanish mixed with Italian, and as I understand these two languages, I sometimes have recourse to them; yet often I lose my pains, asking for one thing and getting another. I sent a servant for a hundred small nails, and he brought me three boxes of *allumettes*." "This is a most tiresome town," he writes, in another letter: "the inhabitants amuse themselves by killing each other, and getting hanged. There are always lawsuits going on, wherefore I have refused all acquaintance; for if I made one friend I should draw down a hundred enemies. I have often been asked, unworthy as I am, to frequent the society of the place; for my ode having been seen at the house of a lady, every one came to visit the author: but it is to no purpose — *mens immota manet.* I never believed myself capable of enduring so much solitude, nor could you have ever hoped so much from my virtue. I pass all my time with my uncle, with St. Thomas, and Virgil. I make many notes on theology, and sometimes on poetry. My uncle has all sorts of kind schemes for me — but none are yet certain: however, he makes me dress in black from head to foot, and hopes to get something for me; when I shall pay my debts, if I can; for I cannot before. I ought to think on all the dunning you suffer on my account — I blush as I write; *erubuit puer; salva res est.*"

Obstacles, however, continued to present themselves to the execution of any of his uncle's plans. Racine, as he grew hopeless of advancement, turned his thoughts

more entirely to composition. He wrote a poem called "The Bath of Venus," and began a play on the subject of Theagines and Chariclea, the beloved romance of his boyhood. After three months' residence at Uzés he returned to Paris.

He returned disappointed and uncertain. Poetry — even the drama — occupied his thoughts; but the opposition of his friends, and the little confidence in himself which marked his disposition, might have made him tremble to embark in a literary career, had not a circumstance occurred which may be called an accident *, but which was, indeed, one of those slight threads which form the web of our lives, and compose the machinery by which Providence directs it. Molière, having established a comic company in Paris, grew jealous of the actors of the Hôtel de Bourgogne, who prided themselves on the tragic dignity of their representations. Having heard that a new piece was about to be represented at that theatre, he was desirous of bringing out one himself, on the same day, in rivalship. A new tragedy, secure of success, was not easy to acquire. Racine had, on his return from Provence, sent his "Theagines and Chariclea" to Molière. The latter saw the defects of the piece, but, penetrating the talent of the author, gave him general encouragement to proceed. At this crisis he remembered him. Molière had a design of the "Frères Ennemis" in his portfolio, which he felt incapable of filling up: he resolved to devolve the task on Racine, but knew not where to find him. With some difficulty he hunted him out, and besought him to write, if possible, an act a week; and they even worked together, that greater speed might be attained. Well acquainted as Molière was with the conduct of a drama, and the trickery of actors, no doubt his instructions and aid were invaluable to the young author. The piece was brought out, and succeeded — its faults were pardoned on the score of its being a first production. When it was afterwards published, Racine altered and cor-

* Grimarest, Vie de Molière.

rected it materially. It cannot be said, indeed, that, as some authors have done, he surprised the world at first with a *chef d'œuvre;* elegance and harmony of versification being his characteristics, he continued to improve to the end, and his first piece may be considered as a *coup d'essai.* The subject was not suited to him, whose merit lay in the struggle of passion, and the gushing overflowings of tenderness. However, it went through fifteen representations. It was speedily followed by his "Alexandre." Neither in this play did he make any great progress, or give the stamp of excellence which his dramas afterwards received. It is said that he read his tragedy to Corneille, who praised it coldly, and advised the author to give up writing for the stage. The mediocrity of "Alexandre" prevents any suspicion that the great tragedian was influenced by envy; and as Racine, in this play, again attempted a subject requiring an energy and strength of virile passion of which he was incapable, and in which Corneille so much excelled, we may believe that the old master of the art felt impatient of the feebleness and inefficiency of him who afterwards became a successful rival.

1664. Ætat. 25.

1665. Ætat. 26.

When we regard these first essays of Racine, we at once perceive the origin of his defects, while we feel aware that a contrary system would have raised him far higher as a dramatist. He was, of course, familiar with Corneille's master-pieces; and he founded his ideas of the conduct of a tragedy partly on these, and partly on the Greek. He did not read Spanish nor English, and was ignorant of the original and bold conceptions of the poets of those nations; and was hampered by an observance of the unities, which had become a law on the French stage, and was recognised and confirmed by himself. He felt that the Greek drama is not adapted to modern times: he did not feel that the Greeks, in taking national subjects, warmed the hearts of their audience; and that the religion, the scenery, the poetry, the allusions — all Greek, and all, therefore, full of living interest to

Greeks, ought to serve as a model whereby modern authors might form their own national history and traditions into a dramatic form, not as ground-works for cold imitations. Racine, from the first, fell into those deplorable mistakes which render most of his plays — beautiful and graceful as they are, and full of tenderness and passion — more like copies in fainter colours of his sublime masters, than productions conceived by original genius, in a spirit akin to the age and nation to which he belonged. Another misfortune attended the composition of his tragedies, as it had also on those of his predecessor. The Greek drama was held solemn and sacred — the stage a temple: the English and Spanish theatres, wild, as they might be termed, were yet magnificent in their errors. An evil custom in France crushed every possibility of external pomp waiting on the majesty of action. The nobles, the *petit maîtres*, all the men of what is called the best society in Paris, were accustomed to sit on the stage, and crowded it so as not to allow the author room to produce more than two persons at a time before the scene. All possibility, therefore, of reforming the dull undramatic expedient of the whole action passing in narration between a chief personage and a confidant was taken away; and thus plays assumed the form rather of narrative poems in dialogue than the native guise of a moving, stirring picture of life, such as it is with us — while the assembly of *dandy* critics, ever on the look-out for ridicule, allowed no step beyond conventional rules, and termed the torpor of their imaginations, good taste. We only wonder that, under such circumstances, tragedies of merit were produced. But to return to Racine's "Alexandre."

This tragedy was the cause of the quarrel between Racine and Molière. It was brought out at the theatre of the Palais Royal — it was unsuccessful; and the author, attributing his ill success to the actors, withdrew it, and caused it to be performed at the Hôtel de Bourgogne: to this defalcation he added the greater injury of inducing Champmélé, the best tragic actress of the time, to quit Molière's company for that of the rival

theatre. Molière never forgave him; and they ceased to associate together. Madame de Sévigné alludes in her letters to the attachment of Racine for Champmélé, but his son denies that such existed; and the mention which Racine makes in his letters of this actress, when she was dying, betray no trace of tender recollection; yet, as these were addressed to his son, he might carefully suppress the expressions of his regret. He taught Champmélé to recite; and she owed her reputation to his instructions.

The criticism freely poured on his two tragedies were of use to the author. He was keenly alive to censure, and deeply pained by it; but, when accompanied by such praise as showed that correction and improvement were expected, he readily gave ear to the suggestions of his fault-finders. Boileau boasted that he taught Racine to rhyme with difficulty — easy verses, he said, are not those written most easily. Racine, as he went on, also began to feel the true bent of his genius, while his desire to write parts suited to Champmélé induced him to give that preponderance to the chief female part that produced, in the sequel, his best plays.

While he was employing himself on "Andromaque" he sustained an attack, which roused him to some resentment. Nicole, in a letter he published against a new sect of religionists, asserted that "a romance writer and a theatrical poet are public poisoners — not of bodies, but of souls — and that they ought to look on themselves as the occasion of an infinity of spiritual homicides, of which they are, or might be, the cause." Racine felt this censure the more bitterly from his having been excluded from visiting the Port Royal on account of his tragedies *; and he answered it by a letter, addressed

* His aunt, a nun of Port Royal, wrote him a letter to intimate this, which may well be called an excommunication: —"I have learnt with grief," she says, "that you more than ever frequent the society of persons whose names are abominable to the pious; and with reason, since they are forbidden to enter the church, or to partake in the sacraments, even at the moment of death, unless they repent. Judge, therefore, my dear nephew, of the state I am in, since you are not ignorant of the affection I have always felt for you; and that I have never desired any thing except that you should give yourself up to God while fulfilling some respectable employment. I conjure you,

"To the author of imaginary reveries." This letter is written with a good deal of wit and pleasantry: we miss the high tone of eloquent feeling that it might be supposed that an author, warmed with the dignity of his calling, would have expressed. His letter was answered, and he was excited to write a reply, which he showed to Boileau. The satirist persuaded him to suppress it; telling him that it would do no honour to his heart, since he attacked, in attacking the Port Royal, men of the highest integrity, to whom he was under obligations. Racine yielded, declaring that his letter should never see light; which it did not till after his death, when a stray copy was found and printed. The conduct of the poets was honourable. It is probable that Racine did not, in his heart, believe in the goodness of his cause; for he was deeply imbued with the prejudices instilled by the jansenists in his early youth. He was piqued by the attack, but his con-conscience sided with his censurers; and the degraded state to which clerical influence brought French actors in those days might well cause a devout catholic to doubt the innocence of the drama. A higher tone of feeling would have caused Racine to perceive that the fault lay with the persecutors, not the persecuted; but though an amiable and upright man, and a man of genius, he was in nothing beyond his age.

As Racine continued to write, he used his powers with more freedom and success. "Andromache," "Britannicus," and "Berenice" succeeded one to the other. The first, we are told, had a striking success; and it was said to have cost the life of Montfleuri, a celebrated actor, who put so much passion into the part of Orestes that he fell a victim to the excitement. "Berenice" was written at the desire of Henrietta of England, duchess of Orleans. It was

therefore, my dear nephew, to have pity on your soul, and to consider seriously the gulf into which you are throwing yourself. I should be glad if what I am told proves untrue; but, if you are so unhappy as not to have given up an intercourse that dishonours you before God and man, you must not think of coming to see us, for you are aware that I could not speak to you, knowing you to be in so deplorable a state, and one so contrary to christianity. I shall, moreover, pray to God," &c.

called a duel, since she imposed the same subject, at the same time, on Corneille. Racine's was the better tragedy, and must always be read with deep interest; for to its own merit it adds the interest of commemorating the struggles of passion that Lōuis XIV. experienced, when, in his early days, he loved that charming princess. The subjeet, however, is too uniform, and the catastrophe not sufficiently tragic. Boileau felt its defects; and said that, had he been by, he would have prevented his friend's accepting the princess's challenge to write on such a subject. When Chapelle was asked what he thought of Berenice, he summed up the defects of the play in a few words. "What I think?" he said, "why, Marion weeps; Marion sobs; Marion wants to be married." That Racine should have excelled Corneille on this subject is not to be wondered; but Corneille had still many adherents who disdained, and tried to put down, his young rival. He had habituated the French audiences to a more heroic cast of thought than Racine could portray. The eager eloquence, the impetuous passions, and even the love of the elder poet were totally unlike the softness and tenderness of the younger. Racine, therefore encountered much criticism, which rendered him very unhappy. He told his son, in after years, that he suffered far more pain from the faults found with his productions than he ever experienced pleasure from their success. This avowal at once displays the innate weakness of the man.* Madame de Sévigné was among

* Boileau's virile and independent mind was far above the weakness of his friend, and doubtless deplored it. At once to console, and to elevate him to a highèr tone of feeling, he addressed an epistle to him, in which are the following lines: —

"Toi donc, qui t'elevant sur la scene tragique,
Suis les pas de Sophocle, et seul de tant d'Esprits,
De Corneille vielli sait consoler Paris,
Cesse de t'étonner, si l'envie animée,
Attachant à ton nom sa rouille envenimée,
La calomnie en main, quelquefois te poursuit.
En cela, comme en tout, le ciel qui nous conduit,
Racine, fait briller sa profonde sagesse;
Le mérite en repos s'endort dans la paresse:
Mais par les envieux un genie excité,
Au comble de son art est mille fois monté.

the partisans of Corneille; and her criticism shows the impression made on such by the new style of the young poet. "I send you "Bajazet," she writes to her daughter: "I wish I could also send you Champmélé to animate the piece. It contains agreeable passages, but nothing perfectly beautiful; nothing that carries one away; none of those tirades of Corneille that make one shudder. Racine can never be compared to him. Let us always remember the difference. The former will never go beyond "Andromache;" he writes parts for Champmélé, and not for future ages. When he is no longer young, and has ceased to be susceptible of love, he will cease to write as well as he now does." This opinion is at least false. The tragedies of Racine still live, or at least did so while Talma and the classic theatre survived in France. And "Athalie," written in his more advanced years, is the best of his works.

In the interval between "Andromaque" and "Britannicus" his comedy of "Les Plaideurs" appeared. A sort of lay benefice had been conferred on him, but he had scarcely obtained it when it was disputed by a priest; and then began a lawsuit, which, as he says, "neither he nor his judges understood." Tired out by law proceedings, weary of consulting advocates and soliciting judges, he abandoned his benefice, consoling himself meanwhile by writing the comedy of "Les Plaideurs," which was suggested by it. We have spoken, in the preceding pages, of the suppers where Racine, Boileau, Molière, and others met; in which they gave full play to their fancy, and gaiety and wit were the order of the day. At these suppers the plot of the projected comedy was talked over. One guest provided him with the proper legal terms. Boileau furnished the idea of the dispute between Chicaneau and the countess: he had witnessed

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Plus on veut s'affoiblir, plus il croît et s'élance;
Au Cid persécuté, Cinna doit sa naissance;
Et peut-être ta plume aux censeurs de Pyrrhus
Doit les plus nobles traits dont tu peignis Burrhus."

a similar scene in the apartments of his brother, a scrivener, between a well-known lawyer and the countess de Crissé, who had passed her life, and dissipated her property, in lawsuits. The parliament of Paris, wearied by her pertinacious litigiousness, forbade her to carry on any suit without the consent of two advocates, who were named. She was furious at this sentence; and, after wearying judges, barristers, and attorneys by her repinings, she visited Boileau's brother, where she met the person in question. This man, a Paul Pry by inclination, was eager to advise her: she was at first delighted, till he said something to annoy her, and they quarrelled violently. This character being introduced into the comedy, the actress, who took the part, mimicked the poor countess to the life, even to the wearing a faded pink gown, such as she usually wore. Many other traits of this comedy were anecdotes actually in vogue; and the exordium of Intimé, who, when pleading about a capon, adopted the opening of Cicero's oration, "Pro Quintio," — "Quæ res in civitate duæ plurimum possunt, hæ contra nos ambæ faciunt hoc tempore, summa gratia et eloquentia," had actually been put to use by an advocate in a petty cause between a baker and a pastrycook.

The humour of this piece shows that Racine might have succeeded in comedy: it is full of comic situation, and the true spirit of Aristophanic farce. Yet it did not at first succeed, either because the audience could not at once enter into its spirit, or because it was opposed by a cabal of persons who considered themselves attacked; and it was withdrawn after the second representation. Molière, however, saw its merits; and, though he had quarrelled with the poet, he said aloud, on quitting the theatre, "This is an excellent comedy; and those who decry it deserve themselves to be decried." A month afterwards the actors ventured to represent it at court. The king entered into the spirit of the fun, and laughed so excessively that the courtiers were astonished. The actors, delighted by this unhoped-for piece of good

fortune, returned to Paris the same night, and hastened to wake up the author, to impart the news. The turmoil of their carriages in his quiet street, in the middle of the night, awoke the neighbourhood: windows were thrown open; and, as it had been said that a counsellor of state had expressed great indignation against "Les Plaideurs," it was supposed that the author was carried off to prison, for having dared to ridicule the judges on the public stage; so that, while he was rejoicing at his success, the report in Paris the next morning was that he had been carried off in the night by a *lettre-de-cachet*.

In 1673 Racine was elected into the French academy. The speech he made on taking his seat was brief and courteous, but not humble, and delivered in so low a voice that only those near him could hear it. Meanwhile he continued to add to his reputation by bringing out his tragedies of "Bajazet," "Mithridates," "Phædra," and "Iphigenia." Each improving in his peculiar excellence, each found warm admirers and bitter enemies. Pradon brought out a tragedy on the subject of Phædra on the same day as Racine; and he had many partisans. Among them was the duke de Montauzier, and all the clique of the Hôtel de Bouillon. They carried their measures so far as to take the principal boxes, on the first six nights of each piece, and thus filled the theatre, or kept it empty, as they pleased. The chief friend of Pradon was madame des Houlieres; who favoured him, because she patronised all those poets whom she judged incapable of writing as well as herself. She witnessed the representation of Racine's play; and returned afterwards to a supper of select friends, among whom was Pradon. The new tragedy was the subject of conversation, each did their best to decry it; and madame des Houlieres wrote a mediocre sonnet enough, beginning —

"Dans un fauteuil doré, Phèdre, tremblante et blème,"

to turn it into ridicule. This sonnet had vogue in Paris. No one knew who wrote it: it was attributed to

the duke de Nevers, brother of the celebrated duchess de Mazarin. The partisans of Racine parodied the sonnet, under this idea; the parody beginning

"Dans un Palais doré, Damon jaloux et blème,"

and even attacked the duchess, as

"Une sœur vagabonde, aux crins plus noirs que blonds."

This reply was attributed to Racine and Boileau. The duke de Nevers, highly irritated, threatened personal chastisement in revenge. The report spread that he meant to have them assassinated. They denied having written the offending sonnet; and the son of the great Condé went to them, and said, "If you did not write it, come to the Hôtel de Condé, where the prince can protect you, as you are innocent. If you did write it, still come to the Hôtel de Condé, and the prince will take you under his protection, as the sonnet is both pleasant and witty." An answer was reiterated to the parody, with the same rhymes, beginning

"Racine et Desprèaux, l'air triste et le teint blème."

The quarrel was afterwards appeased, when it was discovered that certain young nobles, and not the poets, were the authors of the first parody.

This last adventure, joined to other circumstances, caused Racine to resolve on renouncing the drama. The opinions of the recluses of the Port Royal concerning its wickedness were deeply rooted in his heart. Though in the fervour of youth, composition, and success, he had silenced his scruples, they awoke, after a suspension, with redoubled violence. He not only resolved to write no more, but imposed severe penances on himself in expiation for those he had already written, and even wished to turn *chartreux*. Religion with him took the narrowest priestly form, redeemed only by the native gentleness and tenderness of his disposition. These qualities made him listen to his confessor, who advised him, instead of becoming a monk, to marry some woman of a pious turn, who would be his companion in working out his salvation. He followed this counsel, and married

Catherine de Romanet, a lady of a position in life and 1677. Ætat. 38. fortune similar to his own. This marriage decided his future destiny. His wife had never read nor seen his tragedies; she knew their names but by hearsay; she regarded poetry as an abomination; she looked on prayer and church-going as the only absolutely proper occupations of life. She was of an over-anxious disposition, and not a little narrow-minded. But she was conscientious, upright, sincere, affectionate, and grateful. She gave her husband good advice, and, by the calmness of her temper, smoothed the irritability of his. His letters to his son give us pleasing pictures of his affection for his wife and children; melancholy ones of the effects of his opinions. The young mind is timid: it is easily led to fear death, and to doubt salvation, and to throw itself into religion as a refuge from the phantasmal horrors of another world. One after the other of Racine's children resolved to take monastic vows. His sons lost their vocation when thrown into active life; but the girls, brought up in convents, of gentle, pliant, and enthusiastic dispositions, were more firm, and either took the vows in early youth — which devoted them to lives of hardship and self-denial — or had their young hearts torn by the struggles between the world and (not God) but the priests. Racine, on the whole, acted kindly and conscientiously, and endeavoured to prove their vocation before he consented to the final sacrifice; but the nature of their education, and his own feelings, prevented all fair trial; and his joy at their steadiness, his annoyance in their vacillation, betrays itself in his letters. His income, derived from the king's pensions and the place of historiographer, was restricted; and though the king made him presents, yet these were not more than commensurate to his increased expenses when in attendance at court. He had seven children: he found it difficult, therefore, to give doweries to all the girls; and worldly reasoning came to assist and consolidate sentiments which sprang originally from bigotry.

One of the first acts of Racine, on entering on this

new life, was to reconcile himself to his friends of the Port Royal. He easily made his peace with M. Nicole, who did not know what enmity was, and who received him with open arms. M. Arnaud was not so facile: his sister, mother Angelica, had been ridiculed by Racine, and he could not forgive him. Boileau endeavoured in vain to bring about a reconciliation: he found M. Arnaud impracticable. At length he determined on a new mode of attack; and he went to the doctor, taking the tragedy of "Phædra" with him, with the intention of proving that a play may be innocent in the eyes of the severest jansenist. Boileau, as he walked towards the learned and pious doctor's house, reasoned with himself: — "Will this man," he thought, "always fancy himself in the right? and cannot I prove to him that he is in the wrong? I am quite sure that I am in the right now; and, if he will not agree with me, he must be in the wrong." He found Arnaud with a number of visitors: he presented the book, and read at the same time the passage from the preface in which the author testifies his desire to be reconciled to persons of piety. Boileau then went on to say that his friend had renounced the theatre; but at the same time he maintained, that, if the drama was dangerous, it was the fault of the poets; but that "Phædra" contained nothing but what was morally virtuous. The audience, consisting of young jansenist clergymen, smiled contemptuously; but M. Arnaud replied, "If it be so, there is no harm in this tragedy."

Boileau declared he never felt so happy in his life as on hearing this declaration: he left the book, and returned a few days afterwards for the doctor's opinion: it was favourable, and leave was given him to bring his friend the following day. Louis Racine's account of the interview gives a singular picture of manners. "They (Boileau and Racine) went together; and, though a numerous company was assembled, the culprit entered, with humility and confusion depicted on his countenance, and threw himself at M. Arnaud's feet, who followed his example, and they embraced. M. Arnaud

promised to forget the past, and to be his friend for the future — a promise which he faithfully kept."

This same year Racine was named historiographer to the king, together with his friend. In some sort this may be considered fortunate; since, having renounced poetry, he might have neglected literature, had not this new employment given him a subject which he deemed exalted in its nature. How strangely is human nature constituted. Racine made a scruple of writing tragedies, or, indeed, poetry of any kind that was not religious. He believed that it was impious to commemorate in lofty verse the heroic emotions of our nature, or to dress in the beautiful colours of poetry the gentle sorrows of the loving heart: from such motives he gave up his best title to fame, his dearest occupation; but he had no scruple in following his sovereign to the wars, and in beholding the attack and defence of towns. "I was at some distance," he writes to Boileau, "but could see the whole assault perfectly through a glass, which, indeed, I could scarcely hold steady enough to look through — my heart beat so fast to see so many brave men cut down." Still there was no scruple here, though the unjustifiable nature of Louis XIV.'s wars afforded no excuse for the misery and desolation he spread around.

This contradiction strikes us yet more forcibly in his letters to his son, which are full of moral precepts, and just and enlightened advice on literary subjects. Had he been a soldier, it had made a natural portion of the picture; but that a man at once of a lively imagination, tender disposition, and pious sentiments, and who, we are told, evinced particular regard for his own person, should, day after day, view the cruelties and ravages of war *en amateur* shocks our moral sense.

Racine was servile. This last worst fault he owed, doubtless, to his monkish education, which gave that turn to his instinctive wish to gain the sympathy and approbation of his associates. His devotion was servile. He deserves the praise, certainly, of preferring his God to his king; for he continued a jansenist, though the

king reprobated that sect and upheld the jesuits, as his own party; yet he never blamed Racine for his adherence to the Port Royal, so he was never tempted to abandon it. His veneration for the king — his fear, his adulation — were carried to a weakness. It is true that it is difficult for a bold, impossible for a feeble, mind to divest itself of a certain sort of worship for the first man of the age; and Louis was certainly the first of his. Racine also liked the refinements of a court; he prided himself on being a courtier. He succeeded better than Boileau, who had no ambition of the sort; yet he could never attain that perfect self-possession, joined to an insinuating and easy address, that marks the man bred in a court, and assured of his station in it. "Look at those two men," said the king, seeing Racine and M. de Cavoie walking together; "I often see them together, and I know the reason. Cavoie fancies himself a wit while conversing with Racine, and Racine fancies himself a courtier while talking to Cavoie." It must not be supposed, however, that he carried his courtier-like propensities to any contemptible excess. His affectionate disposition found its greatest enjoyment at home; and he often left the palace to enjoy the society of his wife and children. His son relates, that one day, having just returned from Versailles to enjoy this pleasure, an attendant of the duke came to invite him to dine at the Hôtel de Condé. "I cannot go," said Racine; "I have returned to my family after an absence of eight days; they have got a fine carp for me, and would be much disappointed if I did not share it with them."

In the life of Boileau there is mention of the poet's first campaign, and the pleasantries that ensued. Boileau never attended another; but Racine followed the king in several; and his correspondence with his friend from the camp is very pleasing. Whatever faults might diminish the brightness of his character, he had a charming simplicity, a warmth of heart, a turn for humour, and a modesty, that make us love the man. His life was peaceful: his attendance at court, domestic peace,

the open-hearted intimacy between him and Boileau, were the chief incidents of his life. "The friends were very dissimilar," says Louis Racine; "but they delighted in each other's society: probity was the link of the union." He attended the academy also. It fell to him to receive Thomas Corneille, when he was
1684. chosen member in place of the great Corneille. Racine's
Ætat. address pleased greatly. His praise of his great rival
45. was considered as generous as it was just. To this he added an eulogium on the king, which caused Louis to command him to recite his speech afterwards to him. At one time he was led to break his resolution to write no more poetry, by the request of the marquis of Seignelay, who gave a fête to the king at his house at Sceaux; and on this occasion Racine wrote his "Idyl on Peace."

In a biography of this kind, where the events are merely the every-day occurrences of life, anecdotes form a prominent portion, and a few may here be introduced. Racine had not Boileau's wit, but he had more humour, and a talent for raillery. Boileau represented to him the danger of yielding to this, even among friends. One day, after a rather warm discussion, in which Racine had rallied his friend unmercifully, Boileau said composedly, "Did you wish to annoy me?" "God forbid!" cried the other. "Well, then," said Boileau, "you were in the wrong, for you did annoy me." On occasion of another such dispute, carried on in the same manner, Boileau exclaimed, "Well, then, I am in the wrong; but I would rather be wrong than be so insolently right." He listened to his friend's reprimand with docility. Always endeavouring to correct the defects of his character, he never received a reproof but he turned his eyes inward to discover whether it was just, and to amend the fault that occasioned it. He tells his son in a letter, that accustomed, while a young man, to live among friends who rallied each other freely on their defects, he never took offence, but profited by the lessons thus conveyed. Such, however, is human blindness, that he

never perceived the injurious tendency of his chief defect — weakness of character. He displays this amusingly enough in some anecdotes he has recorded of Louis XIV., in which the magnanimity of the monarch is lauded for the gentleness with which he reproved an attendant for giving him an unaired shirt.

Much of Racine's time was spent at court — the king having given him apartments in the castle and his *entrèes*. He liked to hear him read. He said Racine had the most agreeable physiognomy of any one at court, and, of course, was pleased to see him about him. He was a great favourite of madame de Maintenon, whom, in return, he admired and respected. There was a good deal of similarity in their characters, and they could sympathise readily with each other. It is well known how, at this lady's request, he unwillingly broke his resolve, and wrote two tragedies, with this extenuation in his eyes, that they were on religious subjects; indeed, he had no pious scruple in writing them; but, keenly sensitive to criticism, he feared to forfeit the fame he had acquired, and that a falling off should appear in these youngest children of his genius.

The art of reciting poetry with ease and grace was considered in France a necessary portion of education. Racine was remarkable for the excellence of his delivery. At one time he had been asked to give some instructions in the art of declamation to a young princess; but, when he found that she had been learning portions of his tragedy of "Andromaque," he retired, and begged that he might not again be asked to give similar lessons. In the same way, madame de Brinon, superior of the house of Saint Cyr, was desirous that her pupils should learn to recite; and, not daring to teach them the tragedies of Corneille and Racine, she wrote some very bad pieces herself. Madame de Maintenon was present at the representation of one of these, and, finding it insufferable, she begged that it might not be played again, but that a tragedy of Corneille or Racine should be

chosen in which there was least love. "Cinna" was first got up, and afterwards "Andromaque." The latter was so well played that madame de Maintenon found it ill suited for the instruction of young ladies: she wrote to Racine on the subject, saying, "Our little girls have been acting your "Andromaque," and they performed it so well that they shall never act either that or any other of your tragedies again;" and she went on to beg that he would write some sort of moral or historical poem fit for the recitation of young ladies. The request is certainly what we, in vulgar language, should call *cool*. Racine was annoyed, but he was too good a courtier to disobey — he has had his reward. He feared to decrease his reputation. In this he showed too great diffidence of his genius. The very necessity of not dressing some thrice-told heroic fable in French attire was of use; and we owe "Athalie," the best of all his dramas, to this demi-regal command.

His first choice, however, fell naturally upon Esther. There is something in her story fascinating to the imagination. A young and gentle girl, saving her nation from persecution by the mere force of compassion and conjugal love, is in itself a graceful and poetic idea. Racine found that it had other advantages, when he imaged the pious and persuasive Maintenon in the young bride, and the imperious Montespan in the fallen Vashti. When the play was performed applications were found for other personages, and the haughty Louvois was detected in Haman. The piece pleased the lady who commanded it; but she found her labours begin when it was to be acted, especially when the young duchess of Burgundy took a part. She attributed to the court the discontent about the distribution of parts, which flourishes in every green-room in the world, though it appertain only to a barn; however, success crowned the work. Esther was acted again and again before the king; no favour was estimated so highly as an invitation to be present. Madame de Caylus, niece of madame de Maintenon, was the best actress; and even the choruses, sung by the young pure

voices of girls selected for their ability, were full of beauty and interest.

Charmed by the success, madame de Maintenon asked the poet for yet another tragedy. He found it very difficult to select a subject. Ruth and others were considered and rejected, till he chose one of the revolutions of the regal house of Judah*, which was at once a domestic tragedy, and yet enveloped in all the majesty of royalty, and the grandeur of the Hebrew worship. Athaliah, on the death of her son Ahaziah, destroyed all the seed royal of the house of Judah, except one child, Joash, who was saved by Jehosheba, a princess of Israel, wife of Jehoiada the priest, and brought up by the latter till old enough to be restored to his throne, when he was brought out before the people, and proclaimed king, and the usurping queen, Athaliah, slain. The subject of this drama, concerning which he hesitated so long and feared so much, he found afterwards far better adapted to the real development of passion than "Esther." "Esther," after all, is a young ladies' play; and the very notion of the personages having allusion to the ladies of the court gives it a temporary and factitious interest, ill adapted to the dignity of tragedy. Racine put his whole soul in "Athalie." His piety, his love of God, his reverence for priests, which caused him to clothe the character of Jehoiada in awful majesty; his awe for the great name of Jehovah, and his immediate interference with the affairs of the Jewish nation; his power of seizing the grandeur of the Hebrew conception of the Almighty gave sublimity to his drama, while the sorrows and virtues of the young Joash gave, so to speak, a virgin grace to the whole. He had erred hitherto in treading with uneasy steps in the path which the Greeks had trod before; but here a new field was opened. And, to enhance the novelty and propriety of the story, he added a versification more perfect than is to be found in any other of his plays.

* Vide 2 Kings, chap. xi., 2 Chronicles, chap. xxiii.

Yet it was unlucky. It had been represented to madame de Maintenon, that it was ill fitted for the education of noble young ladies to cause them to act before a whole court; and that the art of recitation was dearly purchased by the vanity, love of display, and loss of feminine timidity thus engendered. "Athalie" was, therefore, never got up like "Esther." It was performed, before the king and a few others, in madame de Maintenon's private apartment, by the young ladies, in their own dresses. Afterwards it was performed at Paris with ill success. The author was deeply mortified, while Boileau consoled him by prophesying "le public reviendra;" a prophecy which, in the sequel, was entirely fulfilled.

Many letters of Racine to his family are preserved; which show us the course of his latter years. It was uniform: though a large family brought with it such cares as sometimes caused him to regret his having given up his resolution to turn monk. At home he read books of piety, instructed his children, and conversed with his friends. Boileau continued the most intimate. Often the whole family repaired to Auteuil, where they were received with kindness and hospitality: at other times he followed the king to Fontainebleau and Marli. He had the place of gentleman in ordinary to the king (of which he obtained the survivance for his son), and was respected and loved by many of the chief nobility.

Racine, however, was not destined to a long life; and, while eagerly employed on the advancing his family, illness and death checked his plans. His son thinks that he pays him a compliment by attributing his death to his sensibility, and the mortification he sustained from the displeasure of the king. We, on the contrary, should be glad to exonerate his memory from the charge of a weakness which, carried so far, puts him in a contemptible light; and would rather hope that the despondency, the almost despair, he testified, was augmented by his state of health, as his illness was one that peculiarly affects the spirits. Like every person of quick and tender feelings, he was, at times, inclined to melancholy, and given to brood over

his anxieties and griefs. He rather feared evil than anticipated good; and these defects, instead of lessening by the advance of age and the increase of his piety, were augmented through the failure of his health, and the timid and cowardly tendency of his faith.

The glories of Louis XIV. were fast vanishing. Added to the more circumscribed miseries, resulting to a portion of his subjects from the revocation of the edict of Nantes, was the universal distress of the people, loaded by taxation for the purpose of carrying on the war. Madame de Maintenon felt for all those who suffered. Her notions of religion, though not jansenist, yet rendered her strictly devout. To restore Louis to the practice of the virtues she considered necessary to his salvation, she had thrown him, as much as possible, into the hands of the jesuits. When the question had been his personal pleasures, she had ventured far to recal him to a sense of duty; but she never went beyond. If she governed in any thing, it was with a hidden influence which he could not detect: she never appeared to interfere; and her whole life was spent in a sacrifice of almost every pleasure of her own to indulge his tastes and enjoyments.

Madame de Maintenon was very partial to Racine. His conversation, his views, his sentiments, all pleased her. One day they conversed on the distress into which the country was plunged. Racine explained his ideas of the remedies that might be applied with so much clearness and animation, they appeared so reasonable and feasible to his auditress, that she begged him to put them in writing, promising that his letter should be seen by no eyes but her own. He, moved somewhat by a hope of doing good, obeyed. Madame de Maintenon was reading his essay when the king entered and took it up. After casting his eyes over it, he asked who was the author; and madame de Maintenon, after a faint resistance, broke her promise—and named Racine. The king expressed displeasure that he should presume to put forth opinions on questions of state:—"Does he think

that he knows every thing," he said, "because he writes good verses? Does he wish to be a minister of state, because he is a great poet?" A monarch never expresses displeasure without giving visible marks of dissatisfaction. Madame de Maintenon felt this so much that she sent word to Racine of what had passed, telling him, at the same time, not to appear at court till he heard again from her. The poet was deeply hurt. He feared to have displeased a prince to whom he owed so much. He grew melancholy—he grew ill: his malady appeared to be a fever, which the doctors treated with their favourite bark; but an abscess was formed on the liver, which they regarded lightly.

Being somewhat embarrassed in his means at this time, he was desirous of being excused the tax with which his pension was burdened; he made the request. It had been granted on a former occasion—now it was refused; yet with a grace: for the king, in saying "It cannot be," added, "If, however, I can find some way of compensating him I shall be very glad." Heedless of this promise, discouraged by the refusal, he brooded continually over the loss of royal favour. He began to fear that his adherence to the tenets upheld by the Port Royal might have displeased the king: in short, irritated by illness, depressed by his enforced absence from court, he gave himself up to melancholy. He wrote to madame de Maintenon on this new idea of being accused of jansenism. His letter does him little honour—it bears too deeply the impress of servility, and yet of an irritation which he ought to have been too proud to express. "As for intrigue," he writes, "who may not be accused, if such an accusation reaches a man as devoted to the king as I am: a man who passes his life in thinking of the king; in acquiring a knowledge of the great actions of the king; and in inspiring others with the sentiments of love and admiration which he feels for the king. There are many living witnesses who could tell you with what zeal I have often combatted the little discontents which often rise in the minds of

persons whom the king has most favoured. But, madame, with what conscience can I tell posterity that this great prince never listened to false reports against persons absolutely unknown to him, if I become a sad example of the contrary?"

Madame de Maintenon was touched by his appeal: she wished to, yet dared not, receive him. He wandered sorrowfully about the avenues of the park of Versailles, hoping to encounter her — and at last succeeded: she perceived him, and turned into the path to meet him. "Of what are you afraid?" she said. "I am the cause of your disaster, and my interest and my honour are concerned to repair it. Your cause is mine. Let this cloud pass — I will bring back fair weather." — "No, no, madam," he cried, "it will never return for me!" "Why do you think so?" she answered; "Do you doubt my sincerity, or my credit?" — "I am aware of your credit, madam," he said, "and of your goodness to me; but I have an aunt who loves me in a different manner. This holy maiden prays to God each day that I may suffer disgrace, humiliation, and every other evil that may engender a spirit of repentance; and she will have more credit than you." As he spoke there was the sound of a carriage approaching. "It is the king!" cried madame de Maintenon — "hide yourself:" and he hurried to conceal himself behind the trees.

What a strange picture does this conversation give of the contradictions of the human heart. Here is a man whose ruling passion was a desire to attain eternal salvation and a fear to miss it; a man who believed that God called men to him by the intervention of adversities and sorrow; and that the truly pious ought to look on such, as marks of the Saviour's love: and yet the visitation of them reduced him to sickness and death. He had many thoughts of total retirement; but he felt it necessary, for the good of his family and the advancement of his sons, to continue his attendance at court: for, though not allowed to see the king and madame de Maintenon privately, he still appeared at the public

levees. The sadness he felt at the new and humiliating part he played there, rendered this, however, a task from which he would gladly have been excused.

The abscess on the liver closed, and his depression and sense of illness increased. One day, while in his study, he felt so overcome that he was obliged to give over his occupation and go to bed. The cause of his illness was not known: it was even suspected that he gave way pusillanimously to a slight indisposition—while death had already seized on a vital part. He was visited by the nobles of the court, and the king sent to make inquiries.

His devotion and patience increased as his disease grew painful, and strength of mind sprang up as death drew near. He occupied himself by recommending his family to his friends and patrons. He dictated a letter to M. de Cavoie, asking him to solicit for the payment of the arrears of his pension for the benefit of the survivors. When the letter was finished, he said to his son, "Why did you not include the arrears due to Boileau in the request? We must not be separated. Write your letter over again; and tell Boileau that I was his friend till death." On taking leave of this dear friend he made an effort to embrace him, saying, "I look on it as a happiness that I die before you."

When it was discovered that an internal abscess was formed, an operation was resolved on. He consented to undergo it, but he had no hopes of preserving his life. "The physicians try to give me hope," he said, "and God could restore me; but the work of death is done." Hitherto he had feared to die — but its near approach found him prepared and courageous. The operation was useless — he died three days after its performance, on the 21st of April, 1699, in his sixtieth year.

It will be perceived that we have not said too much in affirming, that the qualities of his heart compensated for a certain weakness of character, which, fostered by a too enthusiastic piety, and the gratitude he owed to him whom he considered the greatest of monarchs, led him to waste

at court, and in dreams of bigotry, those faculties which ought to have inspired him, even if the drama were reprehensible, with the conception of some great and useful work, redounding more to the honour of the Creator (since he gifted him with these faculties) than the many hours he spent in his oratory. It is plain from his letters that something puerile was thus imparted to his mind, which, from the first, needed strengthening. Yet one sort of strength he gained. He had a conscience that for ever urged him to do right, and a mind open to conviction. Under the influence of his religious system, he was led rather to avoid faults than to seek to attain virtues. He had an inclination for raillery, which, through the advice of Boileau, he carefully restrained: he was fond of pleasure; religion caused him to prefer the quiet of his home: and, as the same friend said, "Reason brings most men to faith — faith has brought Racine to reason." Fearful of pain himself, he was eager to avoid causing it to others. In society he was pliant; striving to draw others out rather than endeavouring to shine himself. "When the prince of Condé passes whole hours with me," he said to his son, "you would be surprised to find that I perhaps have not uttered four words all the time; but I put him into the humour to talk, and he goes away even more satisfied with himself than with me. My talent does not consist in proving to the great that I am clever, but in teaching them that they are so themselves." His faithful friendship for Boileau is one of the most pleasing circumstances of his life. His letters show the kindly nature of the intimacy. His wife and family often visited Auteuil; and Boileau, grown deaf, yet always kind, exerted himself to amuse or instruct, according to their ages, the children of his friend.

Of his tragedies the most contradictory opinions will, of course, be expressed. We cannot admire them as the French do. We cannot admit the superior excellence of their plan, because they bring the most incongruous personages into one spot; and, crowding the events of years into a few hours, call that unity

of time and place: generally we are only shocked by the improbabilities thus presented; and when the author succeeds, it seems at best but a piece of legerdemain. Grandeur of conception is sacrificed to decorum, and tragedy resembles a dance in fetters. To this defect is added that of the choice of heroic subjects; which, while it brought the author into unmeet comparison with his masters, the Greeks, rendered his work a factitious imitation, leaving small space for the expression of the real sentiments of his heart; and he either fell into the fault of coldness, by endeavouring (vainly) to make his personages speak and feel as Greeks would have done, or incurred the censure applied to him of making his ancient heroes express themselves like modern Frenchmen. "Phædra" is the best of his heroic tragedies; and much in it is borrowed from Euripides. "Berenice" and "Britannicus" must always please more, because the conception is freer, as due solely to their author. "Athalie" is best of all; most original in its conception, powerful in its execution, and correct and beautiful in its language. There is, indeed, a charm in Racine's versification that wins the ear, and a grace in his characters that interests the heart. There is a propriety thrown over all he writes, which, if it wants strength, is often the soul of grace and tenderness. Had he, at the critical moment when he threw himself into the arms of the priests, and indulged the notion that to fritter away his time at court was a more pious pursuit than to create immortal works of art, had he, we repeat, at that time, dedicated himself to the strengthening and elevating his mind, and to the composition of poetry on a system at once pure and noble, and yet true to the real feelings of our nature, "Athalie" had, probably, not been his *chef d'œuvre;* and, on his death-bed, he might have looked back with more pride on these testimonies of gratitude to God, for having gifted him with genius, than on the multitudinous times he had counted his rosary, or the many hours loitered away in the royal halls of Versailles.

FÉNÉLON.

1651—1715.

There is no name more respected in the modern history of the world, than that of Fénélon. In the ancient, that of Socrates competes with him. It might be curious and useful to compare christian humility with pagan fortitude in these illustrious men. The death of Socrates crowned his life with undying fame. Fénélon suffered no martyrdom for his faith, but he was unchanged by the temptations of a court, and bore injustice with cheerful resignation. Amidst the roughness and almost rusticity of Socrates, there was something majestic and sublime, that inspired awe:* the gentleness and charity of Fénélon, so simple and true in all its demonstrations, excites a tender reverence. The soul of both was love. Socrates mingled wisdom with his worship of the beautiful, which to him typified the supreme Being. Fénélon, in adoring God, believed, that to love the supreme Being was the first, and, if properly accomplished, the only duty of human beings.

François de Salignac de la Mothe Fénélon, was born at the château of Fénélon, in Perigord, on the 6th of August, 1651. His family was ancient and illustrious. His father had been previously married, had several children, and was advanced in years; which caused his relations to oppose his second marriage, especially as the lady of his choice had but small fortune. She was, however, of a high family, being of the same, though a younger branch, as the countess of Soissons, wife of the

* Plato's Symposium.

famous prince Eugêne's elder brother. Mademoiselle de la Cropte added beauty and merit to her distinguished birth. As the child of his old age, the count de Fénélon educated his younger son carefully; his gentle, affectionate nature soon displayed itself, and caused him to be beloved. His constitution was delicate, even to being weakly; but such care was taken to fortify it, that he became capable of great bodily and mental labour. His lively, just, and penetrating mind,—his upright, generous, and feeling heart,—his peculiarly happy dispositions, were perceived by his father in childhood, and cultivated: he was early taught to aspire to regulate his conduct by virtuous principles; and the natural instinct for justice which distinguished him, inclined him to listen and obey. His disposition being flexible and mild, he soon took pleasure in fulfilling his duties, in order, and in attention. Anecdotes are told of his display of reason and his gentleness, during childhood. Religiously and kindly educated, he early learnt to examine his own motives, and to restrain himself; docility was natural to him; but added to this, he already showed toleration for the faults of others. His health being delicate, it was resolved not to send him to any school; a tutor was engaged, happily formed for the task. The young Fénélon was treated neither with severity nor caprice; his lessons were made easy and agreeable, and his capacity rendered the acquisition of knowledge agreeable. At the age of twelve he wrote French and Latin with elegance and facility, and was well advanced in Greek. He had studied with care, and even imitated, the historians, poets, philosophers, and orators of the ancient world. His mind was thus refined and enriched, and he never lost his taste for ancient learning, while he carried into religious studies the good taste, grace, and variety of knowledge he acquired. Being early destined for the ecclesiastical state, no doubt care was taken to direct his studies in such a way as best accorded with a taste for retirement; and that submission and docility were inculcated as virtues of the first order. Submis-

sion and docility he had, but they were based on nobler principles than fear or servility. They arose from a well-regulated mind, from charity, gentleness, and a piety that animated rules and obedience with the warm spirit of love of God.

It was necessary for the purposes of a clerical education, that he should quit his paternal roof. There was a university at Cahors, not far distant, and the abbé de Fénélon (as he was then called) was sent there, at the age of twelve. He did not at first enter on the course of philosophy; although sufficiently advanced, it was feared that his young mind was not as yet capable of the attention that it required, and that he might be disgusted by its dryness, and the difficulties presented. He began, therefore, with a course of rhetoric, which forced him to retread old ground, and to relearn what he already knew. Being so well advanced, he was, of course, greatly superior in knowledge to his equals in age: but this excited no vanity; he felt that he owed the distinction to the cares bestowed on his early years. By the age of eighteen, he had finished his course of theology; he took his degree in the university of Cahors, and returned to his family.

The marquis de Fénélon, his uncle, invited him to his house in Paris, and treated him as his son. The marquis was lieutenant-general of the armies of the king, a man of distinguished valour, and a friend of the great Condé, who said of him, that "he was equally qualified to shine in society, in the field, and in the cabinet." He added piety to his more worldly qualities, and soon perceived and took pride in the admirable dispositions of his nephew. At the age of nineteen, the abbé preached sermons that were generally applauded. This success alarmed his uncle. He perceived the pure and upright character of his nephew; but, aware of his sensibility, he feared that public applause might spoil him, and substitute vanity for the holy love of duty that had hitherto actuated his conduct. From these reasons, he counselled him to retire from the world, and to

enter a seminary, where in solitude and silence he might cultivate the virtues best suited to an ecclesiastic. Fénélon yielded; he entered the seminary of Saint Sulpice, and put himself under the direction of the abbé Tronson, who was its superior-general. The house was celebrated for its piety, its simple manners, its pure faith, and, added to these, its studious and laborious pursuits. He passed five years in this retreat, devoted to his duties and to the acquirement of knowledge. Thus were the ardent years of early youth spent in religious silence and obedience—in study and meditation. There was no worldly applause to flatter, no fame to entice; his happiness consisted in loving his companions, and being attached to his duties. His mind became strengthened in its purposes by example, and his virtues confirmed by habit. At the age of twenty-four he entered holy orders; and his future destiny as a priest was unalterably fixed.

1675. A catholic priest's duties are laborious and strict. Ætat. Fénélon fulfilled them conscientiously; he visited the 24. sick, he assisted the poor. He was attentive at the confessional, and in catechismal examinations; the obscure labours which, when sedulously followed up, amount to hardships, but which are the most meritorious and useful of an ecclesiastic's duties, were so far from being neglected, that Fénélon devoted himself to them with zeal and assiduity. He had an exalted notion of the sacred office which he had taken on himself, looking on it as that of mediation between God and man. Humble, gentle, and patient, he never sought the rich, nor disdained the poor; nor did he ever refuse his counsel and assistance to any one who asked them. Content to be in the most useful, but the humblest class of priests, he neither sought to rise, nor even to be known.

His zeal, however, was not satisfied by his exertions in his native country. He resolved to emigrate to Canada, and to devote his life to the conversion of the savages; and when considerations of health prevented the fulfilment of this plan, he turned his eyes to the

East. We read with interest his fervent expressions on this subject, which show how deeply he was imbued with the love of the good and the beautiful. "All Greece opens itself to me," he wrote to a friend; "the sultan retires in affright; the Peloponnesus already begins to breathe in freedom; again will the church of Corinth flourish; again will she hear the voice of her apostle. I feel myself transported to these delightful regions; and while I am collecting the precious monuments of antiquity, I seem to inhale her true spirit. When will the blood of the Turks lie mingled with the blood of the Persians on the plains of Marathon, and leave Greece to religion, to philosophy, and the fine arts, which regard her as their native soil! —

"Arva beata!
Petamus Arva divites et insulæ!"

He was turned from this project by objects of infinite importance in his native country.

M. de Harlay, archbishop of Paris, heard of his merits, and named him Superior to the convent of new converts in Paris. The spirit of proselytism was abroad in France, as the only excuse for the persecution of the Huguenots; and missions were sent into various provinces. It was important to select for missionaries men suited to the task, well versed in controversy, benevolent, patient, and persuasive. Louis XIV. was informed of the peculiar fitness of Fénélon to the office through his sweetness and sincerity, and appointed him to the province of Poitou. Fénélon accepted the office, making the sole request, that the military should be removed from the scene of his mission. With a heart penetrated by a love of God, and reverence for the church, he devoted himself to his task with zeal and ability, treating his proselytes with a gentleness and charity that gained their hearts. He listened to their doubts and their objections, and answered all; consoling and encouraging, and adopting, for their conversion, a vigilance, an address, and a simplicity that charmed and persuaded. Do we not find in this occu-

pation the foundation for his toleration for all religious sects? While hearing the ingenuous and sinless objections to catholicism raised by his young and artless converts, he must have felt that God would not severely condemn a faith to which no blame could be justly attached, except (as he believed) that it was a heresy.

During the exercise of this office, he became acquainted with the celebrated Bossuet. This great man began his career by an engagement of marriage with mademoiselle des Vieux, a lady of great merit, who afterwards, impressed with a sense of the career which his eloquence would procure him in the church, consented to give up the engagement. As a priest, he became celebrated for his sermons, till his pupil Bourdaloue surpassing him, he yielded his place to him. His reputation as an orator rests on his funeral orations: these bear the impress of a lofty and strong mind, and are full of those awful truths which great men ought to hear and mark.* Louis XIV. named him governor of the dauphin, on which he resigned his bishopric of Condom, that he might apply himself more entirely to so arduous a task as the education of the heir to the throne of France. He wrote his Discourse on Universal History, which Voltaire and D'Alembert both pronounce to be a sketch bearing the stamp of a vast and profound genius. He

* Among such, how beautifully is the following thought expressed: "On voit tous les dieux de la terre dégradés et abimés dans l'éternité, comme les fleuves demeurent sans nom et sans gloire, mêlés dans l'océan avec les rivières les plus inconnues." More known is the apostrophe on the sudden death of Henrietta of England, duchess of Orleans, when his audience wept, as he exclaimed, "O nuit désastreuse, nuit effroyable, où retentit tout-à-coup, comme un éclat de tonnerre, cette accablante nouvelle, madame se meurt, madame est morte!" D'Alembert praises yet more the conclusion of his oration on the great Condé, when he took leave for ever of the pulpit, and, addressing the hero whom he was celebrating, said, "Prince, vous mettrez fin à tous ces discours. Au lieu de déplorer la mort des autres, je veux désormais apprendre de vous à rendre la mienne sainte; heureux, si averti par ces cheveux blancs du compte que je dois rendre de mon administration, je réserve au troupeau, que je dois nourrir de la parole de vie, les restes d'une voix qui tombe, et d'un ardeur qui s'eteint." "The touching picture," says D'Alembert, "which this address presents of a great man no more, and of another great man about to disappear, penetrates the soul with a soft and profound melancholy, by causing us to contemplate the vain and fugitive splendour of talents and reputation, the misery of human nature, and the folly of attaching ourselves to so sad and short a life."

describes the manners and government, the growth and fall of empires, with majestic force, with a rapid pen, and an energetic conception of truth. When the education of the dauphin was completed, the king made him bishop of Meaux; and he employed himself in writing controversial works against the protestants.

Fénélon became at once the friend and pupil of this great man. He listened to him with docility: he admired his erudition and his eloquence; he revered his character, his age, his labours. He visited him at Germigny, his country residence; where they had stated hours of prayer, meditation, and conversation; and passed their days in holy and instructive intercourse. Fénélon lived also in society with the most distinguished and excellent men of the age. The duke de Beauvilliers, governor of the duke of Burgundy, had begged him to write a treatise on the education of girls; of which task Fénélon acquitted himself admirably. His first chapters, which relate equally to both sexes, are the foundation of much of Rousseau's theory on the subject of education. He insists on the importance of the female character in society, and the urgent reasons there are for cultivating their good sense, and giving them habits of employment. "Women," he says, "were designed by their native elegance and grace to endear domestic life to man; to make virtue lovely to children, to spread around them order and grace, and give to society its highest polish. No attainment can be above beings whose aim it is to accomplish purposes at once so useful and salutary; and every means should be used to invigorate, by principle and culture, their native elegance." In addition to this treatise, he wrote one on the ministry of pastors, the object of which was to prove the superiority of the Roman catholic institution of pastors over the ministers of the reformed religion.

The duke de Beauvilliers was fully aware of the greatness of his merit. He was the governor of the sons of the dauphin; the elder, and apparent heir to the crown, the duke of Burgundy, was a child of

ardent temperament and great talents; but impetuous, haughty, capricious, and violent. The duke was a man of virtue; he added simplicity of mind to a love of justice, a gentle temper, and persuasive manners; he felt the importance of his task, and was earnest to procure the best assistance; at his recommendation,
1689. Fénélon was named preceptor to the princes.* Men
Ætat. of the first talent were associated in the task of edu-
38. cation; the duke de Beauvilliers was governor; the abbé de Langeron reader; he was a man of lively and amiable disposition, friendly and kind, with a mind enlightened by study. The abbé de Fleury, under-preceptor, is celebrated by his works. These men, and others, all united in a system which had the merit of success, and was founded on a knowledge of the human heart, joined to that of the peculiar disposition of their pupil: pupil we say, because, though there were three princes, the eldest, who was just seven years of age, was the chief object of their labours. They excited his curiosity in conversation, and awakened a desire to become acquainted with some portion of history, which led also to a geographical knowledge of various countries. He was taught the principal facts of ancient and modern history by dialogues; the knowledge of morals was inculcated by fables. As at first the vehemence of

* D'Alembert well remarks, that the criterion by which to judge of kings, is the men in whom they place confidence. He enumerates those most trusted and favoured by Louis XIV. The dukes de Montausier and Beauvilliers, governors to his son and grandson; Bossuet and Fénélon, their preceptors; with Huet and Fleury, men of learning and rare merit, under them. Added to these selections for one especial object, we may name Turenne, Condé, Luxembourg, Colbert, and Louvois, as his generals and ministers; and when we also recollect the appreciation he displayed for Boileau, Racine, Molière, and others, we may conclude that this monarch deserved much of the applause bestowed on him. Had madame de Maintenon been a woman of enlightened and noble mind, and added to her persuasive manners and the charms of her intellect a knowledge of the true ends of life, and have induced Louis to seek right in the study of good, instead of the dicta of churchmen, his latter days had been as glorious as his first, and it would not have remained for evermore a stain on the French church, that his persecutions and bigotry sprung from his confidence in its clergy. We are told, indeed, that she exerted herself meritoriously on occasion of the choice of Fénélon. Louis did not perceive the merit of this admirable man, calling him a mere bel-esprit. Madame de Maintenon advocated his being chosen preceptor, from his being the most virtuous ecclesiastic at court; a consideration which persuaded the king.

his temper frequently led him to deserve punishment, they contrived that the privation of a walk, an amusement, or even of his accustomed tasks, should take that form; added to these, when he transgressed flagrantly, was the silence of his attendants; no one spoke to him; till at last this state of mute loneliness became intolerable, and he confessed his fault, that he might again hear the sound of voices. Candour, and readiness to ask forgiveness, were the only conditions of pardon; and to bind his haughty will more readily, all those who presided over his education frankly acknowledged any faults which they might commit towards him; so that the very imperfections of his masters served as correctives of his own. This system was admirably adapted to the generous and fervent nature of the young prince. He became gentle, conscientious, and just. His love for his preceptor, under his wise fosterage, was extended to a love for his fellow-creatures. Fénélon had a deep sense of his responsibility to God and man in educating the future sovereign of France. He studied his pupil's character; he adapted himself to it. Nature had done even more in fitting him: his enthusiasm, joined to his angelic goodness, excited at once the love and reverence of the prince, at the same time that he was the friend and companion of his hours of pastime. He conquered his pride by gentleness, by raillery, or by a dignified wisdom, which convinced while it awed. When the boy insolently asserted his superiority, Fénélon was silent; he appeared sad and reserved, till the child, annoyed by his change of manner, was brought to a temper to listen docilely to his remonstrances. His disinterestedness and truth gave him absolute power, and the boy eagerly acknowledged his error. He spared no labour or pains. We owe his fables, many of his dialogues, and his great work, Telemachus, to his plan of forming the mind and character of his pupil.* Religion,

* Voltaire asserts that this idea is a mistake. He assures us (Siècle de Louis XIV., chap. 32.) that the marquis de Fénélon, the archbishop's nephew, declared the contrary, and related that the writing of Telemachus

of course, formed a principal portion of his system. He often said that kings needed religion more than their subjects; that it might suffice to the people to love God, but that the sovereign ought to fear him. The duke of Burgundy grew devout, and the charity that formed the essence of his preceptor's soul passed into his. It is impossible to say what France would have become if this prince had reigned. The energy of his character gave hope that he would not have been spoilt by power, which, in the course of nature, he would not have inherited till he was more than thirty; when his views would have been enlightened by experience, and his virtues confirmed by habit. He had none of the ordinary kingly prejudices in favour of war and tyranny. He was high-minded, yet humble; full of talent, of energy, and respect for virtue. His early death destroyed the hope of France; and hence ensued the misrule which the revolution could alone correct.

Fénélon continued long unrecompensed. The king bestowed a small benefice on him; but he was passed over when other preferment presented itself. On the death of Harlay, it was expected that he would be

was his uncle's recreation, when exiled at Cambray. Voltaire considers this statement supported by his notion that no priest would have made the loves of Calypso and Eucharis the subject of a work to be placed in a young prince's hands. His assertion, however, is liable to many objections. Fénélon was exiled in 1697. Telemachus was put into a printer's hands in Paris in 1698; and was published in Holland in 1699, the year in which the brief of the pope, condemning the Maxims of the Saints, was issued. This interval, which did not include, when the months are numbered, more than a year and a half, was employed by the archbishop in composing replies to Bossuet's attacks; and we discover no moment of leisure for Telemachus. Nothing can be more futile than Voltaire's other objection. The loves of Calypso and Eucharis are, indeed, touched with the tenderness and warmth that characterised Fénélon, but are such as he would consider exemplifying the temptations and corruptions of a court, and suited both to warn his pupil against them, and to show him the path of escape. Fénélon was in the habit of composing fables for the instruction of the prince, while a child, and dialogues for the same purpose, as he advanced in age. There is every reason to believe that he prepared Telemachus to be put into his hands at the dawn of manhood. This idea is the great charm of the work. It excuses its monitorial tone; it explains the nature of the instruction it conveys. It is a monument of the principles of government and morals which he deemed adapted to the sovereign of a great kingdom. As merely a work written to amuse himself, it is pedantic, and, in parts, almost childish; as a manual for the young and ardent prince, who was destined to succeed Louis XIV., to consult when entering into life, it is the best book that was ever written.

named archbishop of Paris; but it was bestowed, on the contrary, on Noailles, whose nephew had married madame Maintenon's niece. Soon after, however, he was named archbishop of Cambray. Madame de Coulanges, writing to madame Sévigné, says that Fénélon appeared surprised at his nomination; and, on thanking the king, represented to him that he could not regard that gift as a reward, whose operation was to separate him from his pupil; as the council of Trent had decided that no bishop could be absent more than three months in the year from his diocese, and that only from affairs important to the church. The king replied, by saying that the education of the prince was of the greatest importance to the church, and gave him leave to reside nine months of the year at Cambray, and three at court. Fénélon, at the same time, gave up his two abbeys, having a scruple of conscience with regard to pluralities.* We have now arrived at the period when Fénélon's career was marked by persecution instead of reward; and he himself became immersed in controversies and defence, which, though admirable in themselves, absorbed a talent and a time that might have been far more usefully employed. We must go back a short time, to trace the progress of circumstances that led to his disgrace and exile.

The characteristic of the French church during the reign of Louis XIV. was its spirit of controversy and persecution. We do not speak of the Huguenots; they were out of the pale of the church. But first came jansenism, which declared that faith and salvation depended on the immediate operation of the grace of God. This doctrine was supported by the sublime genius of Pascal—by the logic and virtues of Arnaud; and boasted of the first men of the kingdom, Racine,

* Le Tellier, archbishop of Rheims, remarked on this, that Fénélon did right, thinking as he did; and he did right, with his opinions. The worldly-mindedness of Le Tellier was so open as to cause him to say good things himself, and to be the cause of them in others. It was he who said of our James II., "There is a good man, who lost three kingdoms for a mass." He said no man could be honest under five hundred a year. Inquiring of Boileau concerning a man's probity, the satirist replied, "He wants an hundred a year of being an honest man."

Boileau, Rochefoucauld, &c., as its disciples. The king was taught by the jesuits to believe that the sect was dangerous, its supporters intriguers, and the whole system subversive of true piety. Fénélon declared himself the opposer of jansenism. He looked upon the free will of man as the foundation of religion, and considered the elective grace of the jansenists as contradictory of the first principles of christianity. In his opinion, love of God was the foundation of piety; and he found in the writings and doctrines of madame Guyon the development and support of his ideas. Madame Guyon, a lady of irreproachable life, who from the period of an early widowhood had devoted herself to a life of piety, was an enthusiast. Her soul was penetrated with a fervent love of God, and so far she merited the applause of christians; but by considering that this heavenly love was to absorb all earthly affection, she impregnated the language, if not the sentiment of divine love, with expressions of ecstasy and transport that might well shock the simple-minded. In exposing this objectionable part of her writings, Bossuet apostrophises the seraphs, and entreats them to bring burning coals from the altar of heaven to purify his lips, lest they should have been defiled by the impurities he is obliged to mention. The language of love is fascinating; and Fénélon, who believed the love of God to be the beginning and end of wisdom and virtue, might well use expressions denoting the dedication of his whole being to the delightful contemplation of divine perfection; but that he should approve expressions that diverge into bombast and rhapsody, is inexplicable, except as a proof that the wisest and best are liable to error. It is true that the catholic religion is open to such sentiment and phraseology. Nuns, who are declared the spouses of Jesus, are taught to devote the softer feelings of their hearts to their celestial husband; but certainly a well-regulated mind will rather avoid mingling questionable emotions and their expression with piety, even in their own persons;

and, above all, they ought to be on their guard against misleading others, by inciting them to replace a reasonable sense of devotion and gratitude to the supreme Being by ecstatic transports, which defeat the chief aim of religion, which is to regulate the mind. Madame Guyon thought far otherwise; at least, as regarded herself. Living in solitude, and in distant provinces, she indulged her enthusiastic turn, and wrote down effusions dictated by emotions she believed to be praiseworthy. She wrote simply, and without art; but her works were full of ardour. She allowed others to read them, and a portion was copied and published. Some of her readers were edified; others naturally recoiled from a style of sentiment and expression which, however we may love God, is certainly not adapted to any spiritual state of feeling. Her faith was, that we ought to love God so entirely for himself alone, that our salvation or damnation becomes indifferent to us, since we should be willing gladly to endure eternal misery, if such were the will of God. A notion of this kind confounds at once all true religion, since we ought to love God for his perfection; and the infliction of pain on the just, cannot be the work of a perfect Being. However, by reasoning on our imperfect state of ignorance and error, madame Guyon was able to make some show of argument, while her expressions are in many parts incomprehensible. She says, that "the soul that completely abandons itself to the divine will, retains no fear or hope respecting any thing either temporal or eternal,"—a doctrine subversive of the christian principle of repentance. She asserts that man is so utterly worthless, that it scarcely deserves his own inquiry whether he is to be everlastingly saved or not; that the soul must live for God alone, insensible to the turpitude and debasement of its own state. Added to this heresy, was her notion of prayer, which she made consist, not in the preferment of our requests to God, such as Jesus Christ taught, but in a state of mind

embued with the sense of God's presence, and an assimilation of the soul with God's perfection.

Her health suffered from the constant excitement of her mind. It was considered that the climate of the province where she resided was injurious, and she visited Paris to recover. She became acquainted with the dukes de Beauvilliers and Chevreuse; her doctrines became known and discussed in Paris; madame de Maintenon was struck and attracted; Fénélon, his own heart full of love, became almost a convert; madame Guyon herself was full of talent, enthusiasm, and goodness; Fénélon became her friend, and denied the odious conclusions which her enemies drew from her doctrines.

As the doctrine gained ground, it met opposition. Des Marais, the bishop of Chartres, in whose diocese was Saint Cyr, the scene of these impassioned mysteries, became alarmed at its progress; and, with the deceit which a priest sometimes thinks he is justified in using in what he deems a righteous cause, he made use of two ladies of great repute for piety, as spies, and from their accounts of what passed in the society of Quietists, found sufficient cause of objection to the sect. Madame de Maintenon listened to his censures, and withdrew her favour. Fénélon saw the danger that threatened madame Guyon, and, steady in his attachment to one whom he considered worthy his friendship, he assisted her by his counsel. Following his advice, and secure in her own virtue, she applied to Bossuet. His manly and serious mind, strengthened by age, rejected at once her mysticism, while her personal merits won his esteem and condescension. It is a singular circumstance, and shows her candour, that she confided her thoughts and her writings far more unreservedly to Bossuet than to Fénélon. Bossuet saw her, explained his objections; and she acquiescing in every thing he suggested, he administered the sacrament to her; a token at once of her submission and his good opinion.

Bossuet penetrated the real piety of the lady, and was unwilling to distress her by opposition, as long as her tenets were confined to her own mind. For what would be highly injurious if spread abroad, was innocuous while it related solely to herself. He therefore recommended retirement and quiet, to which she for a time adhered; but as she had the spirit of proselytism awake in her, she soon grew weary of obscurity, and applied to madame de Maintenon to prevail on the king to appoint commissioners to inquire into her doctrines and morals. The bishops of Meaux and Chartres, and M. Tronson, were accordingly named. For six months they held conferences, and discussed the subject. Bossuet admitted that he was little conversant with the writings of the mystical saints, whose doctrines and expressions were the model of those of madame Guyon; and Fénélon made a variety of extracts, at his request, which were to serve as authorities for the lady's writings. At the conclusion of the conferences, thirty articles were drawn up, to which Fénélon added four; in which, without direct allusion to madame Guyon, the commissioners expressed the doctrines of the church of Rome on the disputed points. In these they name salvation as the proper subject of a christian's desire and prayer; and assert, that prayer does not consist in a state of mind, but in an active sense of resignation: they do not reprobate passive prayer; but they regard it as unnecessary; while they agree in the propriety of direct addresses to the Deity, and frequent meditation on the sufferings of the Saviour. Although these articles subverted her favourite doctrine of the holy state of mind being the life in God necessary to a christian, Madame Guyon, as a dutiful daughter of the church, signed the articles without hesitation.

Bossuet's mind, however, was now awakened to the evils of quietism; and perceiving that it gained ground, he wrote his "Instruction sur les Etâts de l'Oraison," which he wished Fénélon to approve. The latter declined, as it denied in too unqualified a manner his belief in the

possibility of a pure and disinterested love of God, and denounced madame Guyon in too general and severe a manner. His refusal was not censured by his fellow bishops; but he was required to publish some work that should prove his adhesion to the thirty-four articles before mentioned. For this purpose he wrote his "Explication des Maximes des Saints sur la Vie intérieure." The style of this work is pure, animated, elegant, and winning; the principles were expressed carefully and with address. But this very act occasioned contradictions: he feared at once to be accused of giving too much to charity, too little to hope; of following Molinos, or of abandoning St. Theresa. The bishops approved of his book in manuscript, declaring it, in energetic terms, to be a "book of gold:" but the moment it was printed, the outcry against it was violent. Bossuet had not seen it previous to publication. Looking on false mysticism as injurious to true religion and morals, he thought that nothing should be written on the subject, except to condemn it; and that the true mystic, whose state was peculiar and unattainable by the many, should be left in peace with God.

So far we consider Bossuet to be in the right. Love of God being a duty, all that exalts and extends the sentiment into a passion, is at once fascinating and hurtful. The gentle and tender soul of Fénélon could see no evil in love: he thought to soften and purify the heart by spiritual passion; but Bossuet knew human nature better, and its tendency to turn all good to evil, when not tempered by judgment and moderation. He did well, therefore, to oppose the doctrines of madame Guyon; and, if possible, to enlighten his friend. Yet, even in reasoning, he was uncharitable; so that it has been said, comparing his harshness with Fénélon's benignity, that Bossuet was right most revoltingly, and Fénélon in the wrong with sweetness. This was the more apparent, when his conduct on the publication of the book showed the cloven foot of intolerance and persecution. Henceforward, we love Fénélon, and con-

demn his opponent. The latter had right on his side, on the question of doctrine; in conduct, he was entirely and deplorably in the wrong. French writers impute to him the base motives of envy and jealousy. These passions exercise so covert an influence when they spring up in conscientious minds, that Bossuet might fancy himself urged by purer feelings. Still he cannot be justified. Either from fear that the king, who abhorred novelties in religion, would blame him severely, or wishing to make a deep impression, he threw himself at Louis's feet, and besought "his pardon for not having sooner informed him of the fanaticism of his brother." Louis did not like Fénélon.* His elevation of character appeared to him pretension; and in the principles he instilled into his royal pupil he saw the condemnation of himself. These principles were so moulded by the spirit of christianity, that he could not object; but he gladly availed himself of the archbishop's error, to destroy, as much as he could, the general esteem in which he was held, and to visit him with heavy penalties. Madame de Maintenon also became unfriendly: in matters of religion, she always adopted the views of Louis. Her good sense made her see the evil of quietism; and now that Fénélon was accused of it, she withdrew her kindness and support.

* A letter of Fénélon is preserved, addressed to Louis XIV., and written before he was made archbishop. This letter predicts all the disasters that afterwards befell France; it speaks of the wrongs and sufferings of the people, and the misrule of the ministers, with freedom, vigour, and truth. There can be no doubt that the king never saw it. He would never have forgiven such interference with his measures or censures of the people about him. The language of truth would have been so odious that the speaker of it would never have been archbishop. The dislike of the king arose from another circumstance. After his elevation to the see of Cambray, Louis heard his peculiar sentiments discussed, and began to fear that the lessons of so good and pious a man would form a prince whose austere virtue and contempt for vain-glory would be a censure on his own reign — so filled with useless sanguinary wars — and magnificent pleasures, paid for by the misery of his people. That he might form a judgment on the subject, he had conversation with the new prelate upon his political principles. Fénélon, full of his own ideas, disclosed to the king a portion of that theory afterwards detailed in Telemachus. The king, after this conversation, said he had discoursed with the most clever, but most chimerical author in his kingdom. This story is told by Voltaire in his "Age of Louis XIV." It was related to him by cardinal de Fleury and M. Malezieux. The latter taught geometry to the duke of Burgundy, and learnt from his pupil the judgment of his royal grandfather. The letter to the king, alluded to above, is to be found in the notes to D'Alembert's "*Eloge de Fénélon.*"

Louis XIV. angrily denounced all the adherents of madame Guyon; he upheld Bossuet in demanding a formal retractation of the doctrines inculcated in the Maxims of the Saints; he refused to permit Fénélon to repair to Rome; his work having been referred to the pope, for a decision on it; but at once exiled him; that is, ordered him to repair immediately to his diocese, and there to remain. Fénélon wrote to madame de Maintenon, to deplore the king's displeasure; and declared his readiness to submit to the decision of the holy see with regard to his book. He then quitted Paris: he stopped before the seminary of St. Sulpice, where the years of his early manhood had been spent in seclusion and peace; but he would not enter the house, lest the king should manifest displeasure towards its inhabitants for receiving him. From Paris he proceeded at once to Cambray.

1697. Ætat. 46. Although we may pronounce Fénélon's principles to be erroneous, his conduct was in every respect virtuous and laudable. Circumstances had engaged him in the dispute, and he believed that neither honour nor conscience permitted him to yield. As a bishop, it derogated from his dignity to receive the law from his equals in rank. He esteemed madame Guyon; she was unfortunate and calumniated; and he felt that it would be treacherous to abandon her, and much more so to ally himself to her enemies. He founded his opinion and conduct on the writings and actions of saints and holy men, and believed himself to be in the right. No personal interest could bend him; on the contrary, delicacy of feeling and zeal caused his attachment to his cause to redouble in persecution; while at the same time he was firm in his resolution to abandon it, if condemned by the church, his first principle being obedience to the holy see; looking upon that as the corner stone of the Roman catholic religion. His exile found him firm and resigned. The duke of Burgundy was more to be pitied: he threw himself at the king's feet, offering to justify his preceptor, and answering for the principles of

religion which he had inculcated. Louis coldly replied, that M. de Meaux understood the affair better than either he or his grandson; and that therefore he had no power to grant a favour on the subject. To pacify the duke, he allowed Fénélon to retain for a time the title of preceptor. With this barren honour he returned to Cambray. Not long before his palace had been burnt to the ground, together with all his furniture, books, and papers. When he heard the news, he simply remarked, that he was glad this disaster had befallen his palace rather than the cottage of a peasant. On arriving at Cambray, he wrote to his excellent friend the duke de Beauvilliers, expressing his submission to the holy see, and his hope that he was actuated by pious and justifiable motives: "I hold by only two things," he continues, "which compose my entire doctrine. First, that charity is a love of God, for himself, independent of the motive of beatitude which is found in him: secondly, that in the life of the most perfect souls, charity prevails over every other virtue; animating them, and inspiring all their actions; so that the just man, elevated to this state of perfection, usually practises hope and every other virtue with all the disinterestedness that he does charity itself."

There is a mysticism in all this which it is dangerous to admit into a popular religion; but while we read, we feel wonderstruck and saddened to think how a man so heavenly good as Fénélon, and so noble minded as Bossuet, could have drawn matter for hate and pain out of such materials: charity, love of God, the welfare of man,—such were the missiles levelled at each other; and human passion could tip with poison these celestial-seeming weapons. Sir Walter Scott has, with the wisdom of a sage, remarked, that it is matter of sadness to reflect how much easier it is to inflict pain than communicate pleasure.* The controversy of Bossuet and Fénélon is a melancholy gloss on so true a text.

The cause was now carried to Rome. The tenets of Fénélon objected to by Bossuet were two:—1st, that a

* Lockhart's Life of Sir Walter Scott, vol. vi.

person may obtain an habitual state of divine love, in which he loves God purely for his own sake, and without the slightest regard to his own interests, even in respect to his eternal happiness. 2dly, that in such a state it is lawful, and may even be considered an heroic effort of conformity to the divine will, to consent to eternal reprobation, if God should require such a sacrifice. Certainly no general good could arise from men entertaining the belief that God might eternally punish those submissive to his law; and if we add to these fundamental objections the exaggerated point of view in which madame Guyon placed them, and Fénélon in some degree approved, maintaining the possibility of a state of divine love dependent only on faith and a kind of mental absorption in the deity, from which prayer and meditation on divine blessings were absent, and which confounded resignation with indifference to salvation, and conjoin to this unnatural supposition, the high-flown and, we may almost say, desecrating expressions with which it was supposed right to address the Deity, we cannot help siding with Bossuet's opinions, while we blame his conduct, and admire that of Fénélon. The former carried on his cause at Rome through his nephew, the abbé Bossuet, and the abbé de Phillippeaux, both attached to the bishop de Meaux, but both tainted by all the violence of party spirit, which is always most virulent in religious disputes. The abbé de Chanterac, a relation of Fénélon, and his most intimate and confidential friend, a man of probity, gentleness, and learning, and inspired by a sincere affection and veneration for the archbishop, was the agent of the latter at Rome. At first the king and the bishop de Meaux fancied that the pope would at once condemn a book they reprobated: but Innocent XII. appointed a commission. The commissioners stated objections. Bossuet and Fénélon were called upon to deliver answers. These answers were printed; and hence arose a controversy, now forgotten, but to the highest degree exciting at the time, in which Bossuet displayed all his energy and

eloquence, and Fénélon poured forth the treasures of his intellect and his heart. His writings on this occasion are considered his best.* His heart and soul were in them; yet they are now usually omitted from the editions of his works, as regarding a question which the church has set at rest for ever. The delay of the pope, and the popularity which Fénélon gained by his candour and simplicity, enraged the king. His distaste for his theories, which were founded on a belief in virtue, grew into a positive dislike and even hatred for the man, whom he now looked on as dangerous. With his own hand he erased his name, which had remained on the list of the royal household as preceptor to the princes; he dismissed his friends, the abbés Beaumont and Langeron, from their employments as sub-preceptors; he forbade the court to all his relations and many of his friends; and, added to these mundane inflictions, was the clerical insult of the Sorbonne, when it condemned twelve propositions drawn from his book. Fénélon observed on these indignities,—"Yet, but a little, and the deceitful kingdom of this world will be over. We shall meet in the kingdom of truth, where there is no error, no division, no scandal; we shall breathe the pure love of God; and he will communicate to us his everlasting peace. In the mean time, let us suffer, let us suffer. Let us be trodden under foot; let us not refuse disgrace: Jesus Christ was disgraced by us; may our disgrace tend to his glory!" Nor would he listen to any advice to turn the tables on Bossuet, by accusing him, in his turn,

* D'Alembert, in his Eloge de Fénélon, pronounces these works on quietism to be his best. "Let us pardon this active and tender mind," he says, "for having lavished so much fervour and eloquence on such a subject. He spoke of the delight of loving; as a celebrated writer says, 'I know not if Fénélon were a heretic in asserting that God deserved to be loved for himself, but I know that Fénélon deserves to be thus loved.'" Bossuet felt his power, and said of him, as Philip IV. had said of Turenne, "That man made me pass many a wakeful night." And a lady having asked him if the archbishop of Cambray had the talents that were attributed to him, Bossuet replied, "Ah, madam, he has sufficient to make me tremble." Nettled by this talent, Bossuet was driven to attack his adversary by abuse. "Monseigneur," replied Fénélon, "why do you use insults for argument? Do you then consider my arguments insults?" We must in justice record a noble reply of Bossuet to the king: "What should you have done," said Louis, "if I had not supported you in your outcry against Fénélon?" "Sire," replied the bishop, "my cry would have been yet louder."

of error; but earnestly replied, "Moriamur in simplicitate nostrâ?"

Great indeed were the indignities that were heaped on Fénélon; if the untainted can be said to receive indignity from insult. A miserable maniac, who pretended to an improper intercourse with madame Guyon, was brought forward. She, then imprisoned in the castle of Vincennes, heard the accusation with calm contempt, and the confirmed madness of the poor wretch soon caused it to fall to the ground. Bossuet then published his "Account of Quietism," which brought forward many private letters, papers, and conversations, which tended to throw light on the characters of the partisans, which entertained all Paris, and excited a curiosity which this great man ought to have despised. The work, however, is decisive as to the folly and injurious nature of Quietism. Bossuet said that he had long condemned Fénélon's notions concerning prayer, and was glad when madame Guyon referred to him, as this would afford him an opportunity to express his own opinions. She confided to him all her manuscripts, and a history of her life, which for some reason she kept back from Fénélon. Bossuet saw much in her ecstacies and enthusiasm to disapprove, especially when rendered public, as well as in her pretended spirit of prophecy and of working miracles. He saw still more to condemn in her principles with regard to prayer, when she said that it was contrary to her doctrine to pray for the remission of her sins. Bossuet expressed his disapprobation to Fénélon, who defended her; and the writer remarks, that he was astonished to see a man of so great talent admire a woman of such slender knowledge and small merit, who was deceived also by palpable delusions. Bossuet then goes on to express his opinion of the dangerous tendency of the "Maxims of the Saints," against which the outcry had been spontaneous and general. "Can it be said," he continues, "that we wish to ruin M. de Cambray? God is witness! But without calling so great a testimony, the fact speaks. Before his book

appeared, we concealed his errors, even to meriting the reproaches of the king. When his work came out, he had ruined himself. My silence was impenetrable till then. How can we be accused of jealousy? Could we envy him the honour of painting madame Guyon and Molinos in favourable colours? We desire and we hope to see M. de Cambray soon acknowledge at least the inutility of his speculations. It was not worthy of him, nor of the reputation he enjoys, nor of his character, his position, nor understanding, to defend the books of a woman of this kind; and we continually hear his friends lament that he displayed his erudition, and employed his eloquence, on such unsubstantial subjects."

Such an exposition confounded even Fénélon's friends: they drooped till his answer came, whose gentle, unaffected, yet animated eloquence convinced the public, and prevented it from any longer confounding his cause with that of madame Guyon. He called to witness those eyes that enlighten earthly darkness, that he was attached to no person nor book, but to God and the church only, and that he prayed unceasingly for the return of peace and the shortening the period of scandal, and that he was ready to bestow on M. de Meaux as many blessings as he had heaped crosses on him. He declared that he had long ago rejected his book, and been willing to be thrown into the sea to calm the storm, had he thought that his work could foster illusion or occasion scandal; but that he could not allow himself to be disgraced for the sake of his sacred calling. He appealed to Bossuet against himself, and showed with dignity, how injuriously he was treated, on being held up as an impostor by a man who once had called him, "his dear friend for life, whom he carried in his heart." He then proved that he had not supported madame Guyon *, nor approved her visions, concerning

* Poor madame Guyon, thus thrown over by both, suffered much persecution, and was frequently imprisoned. After her liberation from the Bastile she lived in obscurity; but Fénélon always regarded her with affection and respect. She was an enthusiast, full of imagination and talent, and though in error, yet ever declared herself an obedient daughter of the catholic church.

which Bossuet knew much more than he; and asserted that he had excused the intention, not the text, of her works. He proceeds, "Whatever conclusion the holy pontiff may give to this affair, I await it with impatience, desirous only of obeying; not fearing to deceive myself, only seeking peace. I hope that my silence, my unreserved submission, my horror for delusion, my dislike for every suspected book or person, will make manifest that the evil you deprecate is as chimerical as the scandal created is real."

He concludes by throwing himself upon the support of God alone: single and destitute of human help, oppressed by the sovereign of a great nation, and its hierarchy, he declared that he should stand firm till the word should be pronounced by which he promised to abide.

1699. Ætat. 48. That word came. The pope condemned his book. With all the childlike simplicity that he so earnestly recommended to others, the learned and wise archbishop yielded instant obedience to a fiat which it was a portion of his faith to deem infallible. He was in the act of ascending his pulpit to preach, when he received a letter from his brother, which conveyed intelligence of the pope's brief. Fénélon paused for a few moments to recollect himself; and then, changing the plan of his sermon, preached on the duty of obedience to the church. His calm and gentle manner, the sentiments it expressed, the knowledge that was abroad of how sorely his adherence to his doctrine was about to be tried, deeply moved his audience, inspiring it at once with respect, regret, and admiration.

He did not delay a formal and public announcement of his obedience. He addressed a pastoral letter to all the faithful of his district, saying in it, "Our holy father has condemned my book, entitled the 'Maxims of the Saints,' and has condemned in a particular manner twenty-three propositions extracted from it. We adhere to his brief; and condemn the book and the twenty-three propositions, simply, absolutely, and without a

shadow of reserve." * He sent his pastoral letter to the pope, and solemnly assured his holiness, that he could never attempt to elude his sentence, or to raise any objections with regard to it. To render his obedience clear and universal to the unlettered and ignorant of his diocese, he caused to be made for the altar of his cathedral a sun borne by two angels, one of whom was trampling on several heretical books, among which was one inscribed with the title of his own.

There is something deeply touching in this humility and obedience. We examine it carefully to discover its real merits; what the virtues were that dictated it, and whether it were clouded by any human error. We must remember that Fénélon opposed the jansenists, who had sought to elude the papal decrees; that he supported the infallibility of his church, and considerea that the pure catholicism rested chiefly on the succession of pastors who had a right to exact obedience from all christians; that the language he thought due to the papal authority was, "God forbid that I should ever be spoken of, except to have it said that a shepherd thought it his duty to be more docile than the last sheep of his flock." Supporting these opinions, he had but one course to pursue,—unqualified and instant submission. This his

* His pastoral letter is, at length, as follows: —" Nous nous devons à vous sans réserve, mes très chers frères, puisque nous ne sommes plus à nous, mais au troupeau qui nous est confié : c'est dans cet esprit que nous nous sentons obligés de vous ouvrir ici notre cœur et de continuer à vous faire part de ce qui nous touche sur le livre des Maximes des Saints. Enfin notre très saint père le pape a condamnè ce livrè avec les vingt-trois propositions qui en ont été extraites, par un bref daté du 12 Mars. Nous adhérons à ce bref, mes très chers frères, tant pour le texte du livre que pour les vingt-trois propositions, simplement, absolument, et sans ombre de restriction.

"Nous nous consolerons, mes très chers frères, de ce qui nous humilie, pouvuque le ministere de la parole que nous avons reçu du Seigneur pour votre sanctification n'en soit point affobli, et que non obstant l'humiliation du pasteur, le troupeau croisse en grace devant Dieu.

"C'est donc de tout notre cœur que nous vous exhortons à une soumission sincére et à une docilité sans réserve, de peur qu'on n'altère insensiblement la simplicité de l'obéissance, dont nous voulons, moyennant la grace de dieu, vous donner l'exemple jusqu'au dernier soupir de notre vie.

"A Dieu ne plaise qu'il ne soit jamais parlé de nous, si ce n'est pour se souvenir qu'un pasteur a cru dévoir être plus docile que la derniere brebis de son troupeau, et qu'il n'a mis aucune borne à son obéissance. Donné à Cambrai, ce 9 Avril, 1699."

conduct displayed; yet it remains as a question, whether his heart acknowledged the justice of the condemnation of a book which he wrote in a fervent belief in its utility, and had defended with so much zeal. His meaning in his submission was this,—that the book contained nothing heretical, nothing that the saints had not said; and that he might adhere to the principles it enounced: but that the expression and effect of the book was faulty; and that he believed this in his heart ever since the pope's brief had so declared it. His own account of his sentiments, rendered several years after to a friend, gives this explanation:—"My submission," he said, "was not an act of policy, nor a respectful silence; but an internal act of obedience rendered to God alone. According to the catholic principle, I regarded the judgment of my superiors as an echo of the supreme will. I did not consider the passions, the prejudices, the disputes that preceded my condemnation; I heard God speak, as to Job, from the midst of the whirlwind, saying to me, *Who is this that darkeneth counsel by words without knowledge?* And I answered from the bottom of my heart, *What shall I answer thee? I will lay my hand upon my mouth.* From that moment I have not entrenched myself in vain subterfuges concerning the question of fact and right; I have accepted my condemnation in its whole extent. It is true that the propositions and expressions I used, and others much stronger, and with much fewer correctives, are to be found in canonised authors, but they were not fit for a dogmatic work. A different style belongs to different subjects and persons. There is a style of the heart, and another of the understanding; a language of sentiment, another of reason. What is a merit in one is an imperfection in another. The church, with infinite wisdom, permits one to its untaught children, another to its teachers. She may, therefore, according to the variation of circumstances, without condemning the doctrine of the saints, reject their fanatic expressions, of which a wrong use is made." *

* Historie de la Vie de M. de Fénélon, par le chevalier Ramsay.

Such was Fénélon's explanation of his feelings several years after. His letters at the time are full of that gentle spirit of peace and resignation which was his strength and support in adversity. In general, however, he avoided the subject. He had struggled earnestly in the cause of his book, while its fate was problematical; but he considered the question decided, and he wished to dismiss the subject from his own thoughts and the minds of others.

There were several accompanying circumstances to mitigate the disgrace of defeat. The expressions used by the pope in his condemnation were very gentle. His propositions and expressions were declared rather as leading to error, than erroneous; they were pronounced to be rash, ill sounding, and pernicious in practice; but not heretical. While condemning the book, the pope had learned to respect the author; and said of him, to his opponents, "Peccavit in excessu amoris divini; sed vos peccastis defectu amoris proximi;" an antithesis that caught the ear, and was speedily in every body's mouth. His enemies were nettled. They endeavoured to find flaws in his pastoral letter; they tried to induce the pope to condemn the various writings which Fénélon had published in defence of his work; but this Innocent XII. peremptorily refused.

The king and the inimical bishops continued inveterate. The brief was received and registered according to form. The metropolitan assemblies applauded Fénélon's piety, virtue, and talents: some of his own suffragans had the indecency and servility to make irrelevant objections to his pastoral letter; but these were overruled. Bossuet drew up a report of the whole affair, to be presented at the next assembly of the clergy. Considerable want of candour is manifest in his account. He does what he can to weaken the effect of Fénélon's submission, while he insinuates excuses for his own vehemence. The report is remarkable with regard to the testimony it gives to the innocence of madame Guyon. "As to the abominations," it said,

"which seemed the necessary consequences of her doctrine, they were wholly out of the question; she herself always mentioned them with horror." No reconciliation ever took place between Fénélon and Bossuet, who died in 1714.*

Louis XIV. was inexorable. Fénélon continued in exile and his friends in disgrace; such displeasure was shown, that the servile courtiers, among whom we must rank, on this occasion, madame de Maintenon, kept aloof from him. His friends, however, were true and faithful. They took every opportunity of meeting together; it was their delight to talk of him, to regret him, to express their wishes for his return, and to contrive means of seeing him.

The circumstance that confirmed the king's distaste to the virtuous archbishop, was the publication of Telemachus. Fénélon appears to have employed his leisure, while preceptor to the princes, on composing a work which hereafter would serve as a guide and instructor to the duke of Burgundy. The unfortunate affair of quietism led him from such studies; but Telemachus was already finished: he gave it to a valet to copy, who sold it to a bookseller in Paris. The spies, who watched every movement of the archbishop, gave notice of the existence of the book; and when the printing had advanced to the 208th page, the whole was seized, and every exertion to annihilate the work was made. Fortunately, motives of gain sharpened men's wits for its preservation; a manuscript copy was preserved; it was sold to Adrian Moetjens, a bookseller at

* We cannot refrain from quoting Bourdaloue's remarks on the disputes of these two prelates, which are quoted by Mr. Butler, in his life of Fénélon. "There is not a luminary in the heavens that does not sometimes suffer eclipse; and the sun, which is the greatest of them, suffers the greatest and most remarkable. Two circumstances in them particularly deserve our consideration; one, that in these eclipses, the sun suffers no substantial loss of light, and preserves its regular course; the other, that during the time of its eclipse, the universe contemplates it with most interest and watches its variation with most attention. The faults of Fénélon and Bossuet, in their unfortunate controversy, are entitled to the same benign consideration. The lustre of their characters attracted universal attention, and made their errors the more observable, and the more observed. But the eclipse was temporary, and the golden flood remained unimpaired."

the Hague, who published it in June, 1699, — incorrectly, indeed, as it remained during the author's life; but still it was printed; editions were multiplied; it was translated into every European language, and universally read and admired. In the work itself there was much to annoy Louis XIV., who, as he grew old and bigoted, lost all the generosity which he had heretofore possessed, and, spoilt by the sort of adoration which all writers paid, grasped at flattery more eagerly than in his earlier and more laudable career. The lessons of wisdom sounded like censure in his ear. The courtiers increased his irritability, by making particular applications of the personages in the tale*; but without this frivolous and unfounded interpretation, there was enough to awaken his sense of being covertly attacked. The very virtues fostered in the duke of Burgundy, were, to his haughty mind, proof of the archbishop's guilt. He saw, in the mingled loftiness and humility of his heir, in his high sense of duty and love of peace, a living criticism of his reign. From that moment Fénélon became odious; to visit, to love, to praise him, ensured disgrace at court. Telemachus was never mentioned, though Louis might have been aware that silence on such a subject, was to acknowledge the justice of the lesson which he believed that it conveyed.

Meanwhile Fénélon looked upon his residence in his diocese as his natural and proper position. To cultivate internal calm, and to spread the blessings of peace around, were the labour of his day. On his first arrival, he had been received with transport. "Here I am," he cried, "among my children, and therefore

* Most of the applications made of the personages are stupid enough, and we are convinced, that though Fénélon might have referred to the Dutch, when he wrote of the Phenicians, and even have shadowed forth an ideal likeness of Louis XIV. in Sesostris, and perhaps of Louvois in Protesilaus, and of Pomponne in Philocles,—he had no thought of the king's mistresses, Montespan and Fontanges, nor of madame de Maintenon, when he wrote of Calypso, Eucharis, and Antiope. In addition to these allusions, we are told that Pymalion meant Cromwell; Baleazer, Charles II.; Narbal, Monk; and Idomeneus, James II. The first of these is absurd. Still, as we have said, without pourtraying individuals, Fénélon very likely referred to certain questions of policy, and to the actual state of some neighbouring countries, in sketching the government and people of some of the lands which Telemachus visited.

in my true place." And to the duke de Beauvilliers he wrote: "I work softly and gently, and endeavour, as much as I can, to put myself in the way of being useful to my flock. They begin to love me. I endeavour to make them find me easy of access, uniform in my conduct, and without haughtiness, rigour, selfishness, or deceit: they already appear to have some confidence in me; and let me assure you, that even these good Fleminders, with their homely appearance, have more finesse than I wish to put into my conduct towards them. They inquire of one another, whether I am really banished; and they question my servants about it: if they put the question to me, I shall make no mystery. It is certainly an affliction to be separated from you, and the good duchess and my other friends; but I am happy to be at a distance from the great scene, and sing the canticle of deliverance." In accordance with this view, from this hour he devoted himself to his diocesians. Rich and poor alike had easy access to him. Disappointment and meditation had softened every priestly asperity. His manner was the mirror of his benevolent expansive heart. A curate wishing to put an end to the festive assemblies of the peasants on Sundays and other festivals, Fénélon observed, "We will not dance ourselves, M. le Curé, but we will suffer these poor people to enjoy themselves." That he might keep watch over his inferior clergy, he visited every portion of his diocese; twice a week, during lent, he preached in some parish church of his diocese. On solemn festivals he preached in his metropolitan church; visited the sick, assisted the needy, and reformed abuses. He was particularly solicitous in forming worthy ecclesiastics for the churches under his care. He removed his seminary from Valenciennes to Cambray, that it might be more immediately under his eye. His sermons were plain, instructive, simple; yet burning with faith and charity. He lived like a brother with his under-clergy, receiving advice; and never used authority except when absolutely necessary.

He slept little, and was abstemious at table. His walks were his only pleasure. During these, he conversed with his friends, or entered into conversation with the peasants he might chance to meet; sitting on the grass, or entering their cottages, as he listened to their complaints. Long after his death, old men showed, with tears in their eyes, the wooden chair which, in their boyhood, they had seen occupied by their beloved and revered archbishop. His admirable benevolence, his unbounded sympathy and calm sense of justice, won the hearts of all. One man of high birth, who had been introduced into his palace, ostensibly as high vicar, but really as a spy, was so touched by the unblemished virtue he witnessed, that he threw himself at Fénélon's feet, confessed his crime, and then, unable to meet his eye, banished himself from his presence, and lived ever after in exile and obscurity.

The duke of Burgundy had been commanded to hold no intercourse with his beloved and unforgotten preceptor; and the spies set over both were on the alert to discover any letters. When the duke of Anjou was raised to the throne of Spain, his elder brother conducted him to the frontier. Soon after his return, he came to a resolution to break through the king's restriction, and wrote to his revered teacher through his governor, the duke de Beauvilliers. His letter is unaffected and sincere; it laments the silence to which he had been condemned, and assures the archbishop that his friendship had been augmented, not chilled, by his misfortunes. It speaks of his own struggles to keep in the paths of virtue; and relates that he loved study better than ever, and was desirous of sending several of his writings to be corrected by his preceptor, as he had formerly corrected his themes. Fénélon's answer marks his delight in finding that his pupil adhered to the lessons he had taught him. He confirms him in his piety: "In the name of God," he writes, "let prayer nourish your soul, as food nourishes your body. Do not make long prayers; let

them spring more from the heart than the understanding; little from reasoning—much from simple affection; few ideas in consecutive order, but many acts of faith and love. Be humble and little. I only speak to you of God and yourself. There need be no question of me: my heart is in peace. My greatest misfortune has been, not to see you; but I carry you unceasingly with me before God, into a presence more intimate than that of the senses. I would give a thousand lives like a drop of water, to see you such as God would wish you to be!"

In all Fénélon's letters there is not a querulous word concerning his exile, although we perceive traces in the view he takes of the position of others, and in the advice he gives, of the pleasure he must have derived from the cultivated society then collected in Paris; but he could cheerfully bear absence from the busy scene. His simple and affectionate heart found food for happiness among his flock. To instruct his seminarists with the patience and gentleness that adorned his character; to watch over the affairs of his diocese; to teach by sermons, which flowed from the abundance of his heart; and in writing letters of instruction to various of the laity, who placed themselves under his direction,—were his occupations; and his time employed by these duties and by writing, was fully and worthily employed. He regretted his absence from some of his friends, with whom he corresponded; but he never complained. The peace of heaven was in his heart; and he breathed an air purged of all human disquietude. It was his religion not to make himself unhappy about even his own errors. He taught that we ought to deliver our souls into the hands of God, and submit, as to his pleasure, to the shame and annoyance brought on us by our imperfections; not only to feel as nothing before him, but not even to wish to feel any thing. "I adore you, infant Jesus," he wrote, "naked, and weeping, and stretched upon the cross. I love your infancy and poverty: O! that I were as childlike and poor as you. O Eternal wisdom, reduced

to infancy, take away my vain and presumptuous wisdom; make me a child like yourself. Be silent, ye wise men of the earth! I desire to be nothing, to know nothing; to believe all, to suffer all, and to love all. The Word, made flesh, lisps, weeps, and gives forth infantine cries;—and shall I take pride in wisdom; shall I take pleasure in the efforts of my understanding, and fear that the world should not entertain a sufficiently high idea of my ability. No, no; all my delight will be to grow little; to crush myself; to become obscure; to be silent; to join to the shame of Jesus crucified, the impotence and lisping of the infant Jesus."

When we reflect that this was written by a man who sedulously adorned his mind by the study of the ancients, and who added to his own language, books written with elegance and learning, and which display a comprehensive understanding and delicate taste, we feel the extent of that humility which could disregard all these human acquirements compared with the omniscience of God; and that as Socrates acknowledged that he knew nothing, and was therefore pronounced to be the wisest of men, so did the sense which Fénélon entertained of the nothingness of human wisdom, stamp him as far advanced in that higher knowledge which can look down on all human efforts as the working of emmets on an ant-hill.

Fénélon believed that man had no power to seek heavenly good without the grace of the Saviour. When man does right, he alleged that he only assented to the impulse of God, who disposed him through his grace so to assent. When he did ill, he only resisted the action of God, which produces no good in him without the co-operation of his assent, thus preserving his free will. He considered true charity, or love of God, to which he gave this name, as an intimate sense of and delight in God's perfections, without any aspiration to salvation. He supposed that there was a love of the beautiful, the perfect, and the orderly, beyond all taste and sentiment, which may influence us when we lose

the pleasurable sense of the action of the grace of God, and which is a sufficing reason to move the will in all the pains and privations which abound on the holy paths of virtue. He would have carried this notion further, but was obliged to mould his particular notion by the faith of the church, which enforces what it calls a "chaste hope of salvation," in contradiction to the quietists, who banish every idea of beatification, and profess to be willing to encounter perdition, if such were the Almighty's will. He was more opposed to jansenism, which makes salvation all in all, while it confines it to the elect of God. Jansenism, indeed, he considered as peculiarly injurious, and destructive to the true love of God. But as bigotry made no part of his nature, he tolerated the jansenists, though he would gladly have converted them; he invited their chief, father Quesnell, to his palace, promising not to introduce any controversy unless he wished; but testifying his desire, at the same time, to prove that he mistook the meaning of St. Augustin, on whom Jansenius founded his doctrine. Of Pascal's Provincial Letters, he wrote to the duke de Beauvilliers, that he recommended that his royal pupil should read them, as the great reputation they enjoyed, would cause him certainly to desire to see them; and sent a memorial at the same time, which he considered as a refutation of the mistakes into which he believed Pascal had fallen. He was equally tolerant of protestants; and when M. Brunier, minister of the protestants dispersed on the frontiers of France, came to Mons to see him, Fénélon received him with his accustomed cordial hospitality, and begged him often to repeat his visit.

During the war for the Spanish succession, Fénélon's admirable character shone forth in all its glory. Living on a frontier exposed to the incursions of the enemy, he was active in alleviating the sufferings of the people. The nobles and officers of the French armies, who passed through Cambray, pointedly avoided him, out of compliment to their mistaken sovereign; while a con-

trary sentiment, a wish to annoy Louis XIV., joined to sincere admiration of his genius and virtue, caused th enemy to act very differently. The English, Germans, and Dutch, were eager to display their veneration of the archbishop. They afforded him every facility for visiting the various parts of his diocese. They sent detachments to guard his fields, and to escort his harvest into the city. He was often obliged to have recourse to artifice to avoid the honours which the generals of the armies of the enemy were desirous of paying. He declined the visits of the duke of Marlborough and prince Eugene, who were desirous of rendering homage to his excellence. He refused the military escorts offered to ensure his safety; and, with the attendance only of a few ecclesiastics, he traversed countries devastated by war, carrying peace and succour in his train, so that his pastoral visits might be termed the truce of God. The French biographers delight in recording one trait of his benevolence. During one of his journeys, he met a peasant in the utmost affliction. The archbishop asked the cause of his grief; and was told that the enemy had driven away his cow, on which his family depended for support, and that his life was in danger if he went to seek it. Fénélon, on this, set off in pursuit, found the cow, and drove it home himself to the peasant's cottage.

Deserted and neglected by his countrymen, he took pleasure in receiving foreigners, and learning from them the manners, customs, and laws of their various countries. His philanthropy was of the most extensive kind: "I love my family," he said, "better than myself; I love my country better than my family; but I love the human race more than my country." A German prince visited him, desirous of receiving lessons of wisdom. Him he taught toleration; satisfaction in a constitutional government; and a desire for the progress of knowledge among his subjects. The duke of Orleans, afterwards the libertine regent of France, consulted him with regard to many sceptical doubts. He asked him how the

existence of God was proved; what worship the Deity approved, and whether he was offended by a false one. Fénélon replied by a treatise on the existence of God, which is characterised, as his theology always is, by a fervent spirit of charity.

In 1702 the duke of Burgundy headed the army in Flanders. He with difficulty obtained leave to see the archbishop, when he visited Cambray; his interview, when permitted, was restricted to being a public one. Fénélon, fearing to raise a painful struggle in his beloved pupil's mind, had left Cambray, when the letter came to apprise him that they were allowed to meet. They met at a public dinner at the town-house of Cambray. It passed in cold ceremony and painful reserve: it was only at the close, when Fénélon presented the napkin to the prince, that the latter marked his internal feeling, when, on returning it, he said aloud, "I am aware, my lord archbishop, of what I owe you, and you know what I am." They corresponded after this, and Fénélon's letters are remarkable for the care he takes to check all bigotry, intolerance, and petty religious observances in his pupil; telling him that a prince cannot serve God as a hermit or an obscure individual. He informed him that the public regarded him as virtuous, but as stern, timid, and scrupulous. He endeavoured to raise him above these poorer thoughts, to the lofty height he himself had reached. He taught him to regard his rank in its proper light, as a motive for goodness and benevolence, and to desire to be the father, not the master of his people. His opinions with regard to the duke are given in great detail in a letter of advice addressed to the duke Beauvilliers, in which we see that the priest has no sinister influence over the man; and that while Fénélon practised privation in his own person, he could recommend an opposite course to an individual differently placed. This intercourse was again renewed in 1708, when the duke again made a campaign in Flanders. The letters of his ancient preceptor on this occasion, are frank and manly: he tells him the public opinion; he advises him how

best to gain general confidence; and to sacrifice all his narrow and peculiar opinions to an elevated, unprejudiced view of humanity. The reply of the prince, thanking him for his counsels, and assuring him of his resolution to act upon them, is highly worthy of a man of honour and virtue.

The effect of the war was to spread famine and misery 1709. throughout France: 1709 was a year marked by suffer- Ætat. ing and want; the army in Flanders was destitute of 58. depôts for food. Fénélon set the example of furnishing the soldiery with bread. Some narrowminded men around him remonstrated, saying that the king had treated him so ill, that he did not deserve that he should come forward to assist his subjects. Fénélon, animated by that simple sense of justice that characterised him, replied, "The king owes me nothing; and in the evils that overwhelm the people, I ought, as a Frenchman and a bishop, to give back to the state what I have received from it." His palace was open to the officers who needed assistance and shelter; and after the battle of Malplaquet, that, as well as his neighbouring seminary, was filled with the wounded. His generosity went so far as to hire houses to receive others, when his own apartments were full. His prudence and order afforded him the means of meeting these calls on his liberality, which he did not confine to the upper classes. Whole villages were emptied by the approach of the armies, and the inhabitants took refuge in the fortified towns: to watch over these sufferers — to console them, and prevent the disorders usually incident to such an addition to the population, was another task, which he cheerfully fulfilled, going about among them, and soothing them with his gentleness and kindness.

When the dauphin, father of the duke of Burgundy, 1711. died, — men, supple in their servility, began to consider Ætat. that, on the event of his pupil's accession to the throne, 60. Fénélon would become powerful; and the nobles and officers began to pay him court, when passing through Cambray: Fénélon received them with the same simplicity with which he regarded their absence. He was

far above all human grandeur; he only made use of the respect rendered him, for the benefit of those who paid it. It was a miserable reverse to his hopes for France
1612. when his royal pupil died. Fénélon received the intel-
Ætat. ligence of his death with that mingled grief and resig-
61. nation that belonged to his character. He declared, that though all his ties were broken, and that nothing hereafter would attach him to earth, yet that he would not move a finger to recal the prince to life, against the will of God. His last years were marked by the deaths of several of his dearest friends. The abbé de Langeron, banished from court for his sake, and who resided with him at Cambray, had died 1710, and with his death began the series of losses afterwards destined to afflict Fénélon deeply. In 1713 the dukes de Bouvilliers and de Chevreuse, both died. He felt his losses deeply; knowing that they came from the hand of God, he resigned himself, but grew entirely detached from the affections and interests of this world.

Louis at last learnt to appreciate the merits of the most virtuous and wisest man in his kingdom. His misfortunes, and the deaths, one after the other, of all his posterity, softened his heart; added to this, the death of Fénélon's pupil took away the sting of envy; he no longer feared that he should be surpassed in glory and good by his successor; and he could love the teacher of those virtues, which existed no longer in the person of his grandson to eclipse his own. That such unworthy motives might actuate him, is proved by his act of burning all the papers and letters of Fénélon which were found among the effects of the duke of Burgundy after his death. Fénélon requested the duke de Beauvilliers to claim them, who made the request to madame de Maintenon. She replied: "I was desirous of sending you back all the papers belonging to you and M. de Cambray; but the king chose to burn them himself. I confess that I am truly sorry; nothing so beautiful or so good was ever written. If the prince whom we lament had some faults, it was not because the counsels given him were feeble, or be-

cause he was too much flattered. We may say, that those who act uprightly are never put to confusion." But though the king indulged a mean spirit in destroying these invaluable papers, the reading them led him to esteem the writer. Accordingly, he often sent to consult him, and was about to recal him to court, when the fatal event arrived, which robbed the world of him. We are told also that the pope, Clement XI., had destined for him a cardinal's hat.

At the beginning of 1715 Fénélon fell ill of an inflammation of the chest, which caused a continual fever. It lasted for six days and a half, with extreme pain. During this period he gave every mark of patience, gentleness, and firmness. There were no unmanly fears, nor unchristian negligence. On the fifth day of his illness he dictated a letter to the confessor of the king, declaratory of his inviolable attachment to his sovereign, and his entire acquiescence in the condemnation of his book. He made two requests, both relating to his diocese: the one, that a worthy successor, opposed to jansenism, should be given him; the other regarded the establishment of his seminary. From this time he appeared insensible to what he quitted, and occupied only by the thought of what he was going to meet. He passed his last hours surrounded by his friends, and particularly by his beloved nephew, the marquis de Fénélon *; and breathed his last without a pang.

* The marquis de Fénélon was the archbishop's great nephew. His uncle, who first brought him forward in Paris, left a daughter, who married a brother of Fénélon by his father's first marriage. The marquis in question was the grandson of this pair. He was brought up at Cambray by his great uncle. The most affectionate and intimate of Fénélon's letters are addressed to him. He was appointed ambassador to Holland, and second plenipotentiary under cardinal Fleury at the congress of Soissons. He was killed at the battle of Raucoux, October 11. 1746. Voltaire knew him well, and says on this occasion, "The only general officer France lost in this battle was the marquis de Fénélon, nephew of the immortal archbishop of Cambray. He had been brought up by him, and had all his virtue with a very different character. Twenty years employed in the embassy to Holland had not extinguished a fire and rash valour, which cost him his life. Having been formerly wounded in the foot, and scarcely able to walk, he penetrated the enemy's entrenchments on horseback. He sought death, and he found it. His extreme devotion augmented his intrepidity. He believed that to die for his king was the act most agreeable to God. We must confess that an army composed of men entertaining this sentiment would be invincible."

Louis XIV. outlived him but a few months. The duke of Orleans became regent. France flourished in peace under his regency; while its aristocracy was corrupted by a state of libertinism and profligacy, unequalled except in the pages of Suetonius. Had Fénélon lived, would he not have influenced the regent, whose perverted mind was yet adorned by talents, and regulated by a sense of political justice?—Would he not have fostered the child of his pupil, and engrafted virtue in the soul of Louis XV.? This is but conjecture; futile, except as it may teach us to make use of the example and precepts of the good and wise, while they are spared to us. Soon all but their memory is lost in the obscurity and nothingness of the tomb.

In person, Fénélon was tall and well made; a paleness of countenance testified his studious and abstemious habits; while his expressive eyes diffused softness and gentle gaiety over his features. His manners displayed the grace and dignity, the delicacy and propriety, which belong to the well-born, when their understandings are cultivated by learning, and their hearts enlarged by the practices of virtue. Eloquent, witty, judicious, and pleasing, he adapted himself to the time and person with whom he conversed, and was admired and beloved by all.

His character is sufficiently detailed in these pages;—his benevolence, generosity, and sublime elevation above all petty and self-interested views. It may be said, that his piety was too softening and ideal; yet in practice it was not so. His nephew, brought up under his care, and embued with his principles of religion, was a gallant soldier, and believed that it was the duty of a subject to die for his king; and, acting on this belief, fell at the battle of Raucoux. A religion that teaches toleration, active charity, and resignation, inculcates the lessons to which human nature inclines with most difficulty, and which, practised in a generous, unprejudiced manner, raise man to a high pitch of excellence. "I know not," says a celebrated writer, "whether God ought to be loved for

himself, but I am sure that this is how we must love Fénélon." An infidel must have found piety amiable, when it assumed his shape. The artless simplicity of his character prevented his taking pride in his own virtues*: he felt his weaknesses; he scarcely deplored them; he laid them meekly at the feet of God; and, praying only that he might learn to love him better, believed that in the perfection of love he should find the perfection of his own nature.

The chevalier Ramsay, a Scotch baronet, gives us, in his life, a delightful account of his intimate intercourse. Ramsay was troubled by scepticism on religious subjects, and applied to the archbishop of Cambray for enlightenment, which he afforded with a zeal, patience, and knowledge, both of his subject and human nature, which speedily brought his disciple over to catholicism. Ramsay delights to expatiate on the virtues and genius of his admirable friend. He penetrated to the depths of his heart, and read those internal sentiments which Fénélon never expressed in writing. "Had he been born in a free country," Ramsay afterwards wrote to Voltaire, "he would have displayed his whole genius, and given a full career to his own principles, never known." That, of all men, Fénélon must have entertained feelings too sublime, in their abnegation of self, to please a despotism, both of church and state, we can readily believe.†

* "Fénélon a caractérisé lui-même en peu de mots cette simplicité qui le rendoit si chèr à tous les cœurs. 'La simplicite,' disoit-il, 'est la droiture d'une ame qui s'interdit tout retour sur elle et sur ses actions. Cette vertu est différent de la sincérité, et la surpasse. On voit beaucoup de gens qui sont sincères sans être simples. Ils ne veulent passer que pour ce qu'ils sont, mais ils craignent sans cesse de passer pour ce qu'ils ne sont pas. L'homme simple n'affecte ni la vertu, ni la vérité même; il n'est jamais occupé de lui, il semble avoir perdu ce *moi* dont on est si jaloux.' Dans ce portrait Fénélon se peignoit lui-même sans le vouloir. Il étoit bien mieux que modeste, car il ne songeoit pas même à l'être; il lui suffisoit pour être aimé de se montrer tel qu'il étoit, et on pouvoit lui dire:

L'art n'est pas fait pour toi, tu n'en a pas besoin.

—*Eloge de Fénélon, par D'Alembert.*

† There is reason to think that the principles to which Ramsay alludes, regarded government. Bent upon destroying the power of the church, then at its height, Voltaire and the philosophers of that day regarded monarchical power with an eye of favour. Fénélon had much

Kind and gentle to all, lending himself with facility to every call made on him; polite, from the pure source of politeness, benevolence of heart; — every one was welcomed, every one satisfied. A friend one day made excuses for interrupting him in a work he was desirous of finishing: "Do not distress yourself," he replied: "you do more good to me by interrupting me, than I should have done to others by working." Though of a sensitive and vivacious temperament, he was never betrayed into any show of temper. During the first years of his exile, when he severely felt his estrangement from the refined and enlightened society of the capital, and from friends dear to his heart, he was still equable and cheerful; always alive to the interests of others, never self-engrossed. He had the art of adapting himself to the capacities and habits of every one: — "I have seen him," says Ramsay, "in a single day, mount, and descend all ranks; converse with the noble in their own language, preserving throughout his episcopal dignity; and then talk with the lowly, as a good father with his children, and this without effort or affectation."

If he were thus to his acquaintance, to the friends whom he loved, he was far more. From the divine love which he cherished, as the source of every virtue, sprung a spirit of attachment pure, tender, and generous. His own sentiments with regard to friendship, when he expatiates on it, in a letter to the duke of Burgundy, are conceived in the noblest and most disinterested sense. In practice, he was forbearing and delicate; he bore the faults of those around him, yet seized the happy moment to instruct and amend. He felt that self-love rendered us alive to the imperfections of another; and that want of sympathy arose from

more enlightened opinions. "Every wise prince," he said, "ought to desire to be only an executor of the laws, and to have a supreme council to moderate his authority." D'Alembert's remarks on this expression, show how totally he misapprehended its true meaning. Fénélon had conversed with Ramsay and other Englishmen; he knew the uses of a constitution; he was fully aware of the benefit a nation derived, when the legislative power was above the executive.

being too self-engrossed. He knew it was the duty of a friend to correct faults; but he could wait patiently for years to give one salutary lesson. In the same spirit, he begged his friends not to be sparing in their instructions to him. His great principle was, that all was in common with friends. "How delightful it would be," he sometimes said, "if every possession was a common one; if each man would no longer regard his knowledge, his virtues, his enjoyments, and his wealth, as his own merely. It is thus, that in heaven, that the saints have all things in God, and nothing in themselves. It is a general and infinite beatitude, whose flux and reflux causes their fulness of bliss. If our friends below would submit to the same poverty, and the same community of all things, temporal and spiritual, we should no longer hear those chilling words *thine* and *mine*; we should all be rich and poor in unity." The death of one he loved could move him to profound grief; and he could say — "Our true friends are at once our greatest delight and greatest sorrow. One is tempted to wish that all attached friends should agree to die together on the same day: those who love not, are willing to bury all their fellow-creatures, with dry eyes and satisfied hearts; they are not worthy to live. It costs much to be susceptible to friendship; but those who are, would be ashamed if they were not; they prefer suffering to heartlessness." Religion alone could bring consolation: — "Let us unite ourselves in heart," he wrote, "to those whom we regret; he is not far from us, though invisible; he tells us, in mute speech, to hasten to rejoin him. Pure spirits see, hear, and love their friends in the common centre." Such are the soothing expressions of Fénélon; and such as these caused d'Alembert to remark, "that the touching charm of his works, is the sense of quiescence and peace which he imparts to his reader; it is a friend who draws near, and whose soul overflows into yours: he suspends, at least for a time, your regrets and sufferings. We may pardon many men who force us to

hate humanity, in favour of Fénélon who makes us love it."

Most of his works are either pious or written for the instruction of his royal pupil. The duke de Beauvilliers had copies of most of those letters and papers, addressed to the duke of Burgundy, which Louis XIV. destroyed. Among these, his directions with regard to the conscience of a king, is full of enlightened morality.

He had a great love for all classic learning. His Telemachus is full of traits which show that he felt all the charm of Greek poetry. He was made member of the French academy the 31st of March, 1693, in the place of Pelisson. His oration on the occasion was simple and short. He afterwards addressed his Dialogues on Eloquence to the academy. These prove the general enlightenment of his mind, and the justice of his views. His remarks on language are admirable. When he speaks of tragedy, he rises far above Corneille, Racine, and Voltaire, in his conception of the drama; in that, as in every other species of composition, he tried to bring back his countrymen to simplicity and nature. He desired them to speak more from the heart, less from the head. He shows how what the French falsely deemed to be delicacy of taste, took all vivid colouring and truth from their pictures, giving us a high enamel, in place of vigorous conception and finished execution. He gives just applause to Molière; his only censure is applied to the Misanthrope: "I cannot pardon him," he says, "for making vice graceful, and representing virtue as austere and odious." All his works are essentially didactic; and they have the charm which we must expect would be found in the address of one so virtuous and wise, and calm, to erring passion-tost humanity.

His Telemachus has become, to a great degree, a mere book of instruction to young persons. In its day, it was considered a manual for kings, inculcating their duties even too strictly, and with too much re-

gard for the liberties of the subject. In every despotic country, where it is considered eligible that the sovereign should be instructed and the people kept in ignorance, this work is still invaluable, if such a one can be found; but, in a proper sense, it cannot, except in Turkey and Russia. There is much tyranny, but the science of politics is changed: the welfare of nations rests on another basis than the virtues and wisdom of kings;—it rests on knowledge, and morals of the people. The proper task of the lawgiver and philanthropist is to enlighten nations, now that masses exert so great an influence over governments. A king, as every individual placed in a conspicuous situation, must be the source of much good and evil, happiness or misery, within his own circle; but in England and France the influence of the people is so direct as to demand our most anxious endeavours to enlighten them; while, in countries where yet they have no voice in government, the day is so near at hand when they shall obtain it, that it is even more necessary to render them fit to exert it; so that when the hour comes, they shall not be fierce as emancipated slaves, — but, like free men, just, true, and patient. This change has operated to cast Telemachus into shade; and the decay of catholicism has spread a similar cloud over Fénélon's religious works; but the spirit of the man will preserve them from perishing. His soul, tempered in every virtue, transcends the priestly form it assumed on earth; and every one who wishes to learn the lessons taught by that pure, simple, and entire disinterestedness, which is the foundation of the most enlightened wisdom and exalted virtue, must consult the pages of Fénélon. He will rise from their perusal a wiser and a better man.

END OF THE FIRST VOLUME.